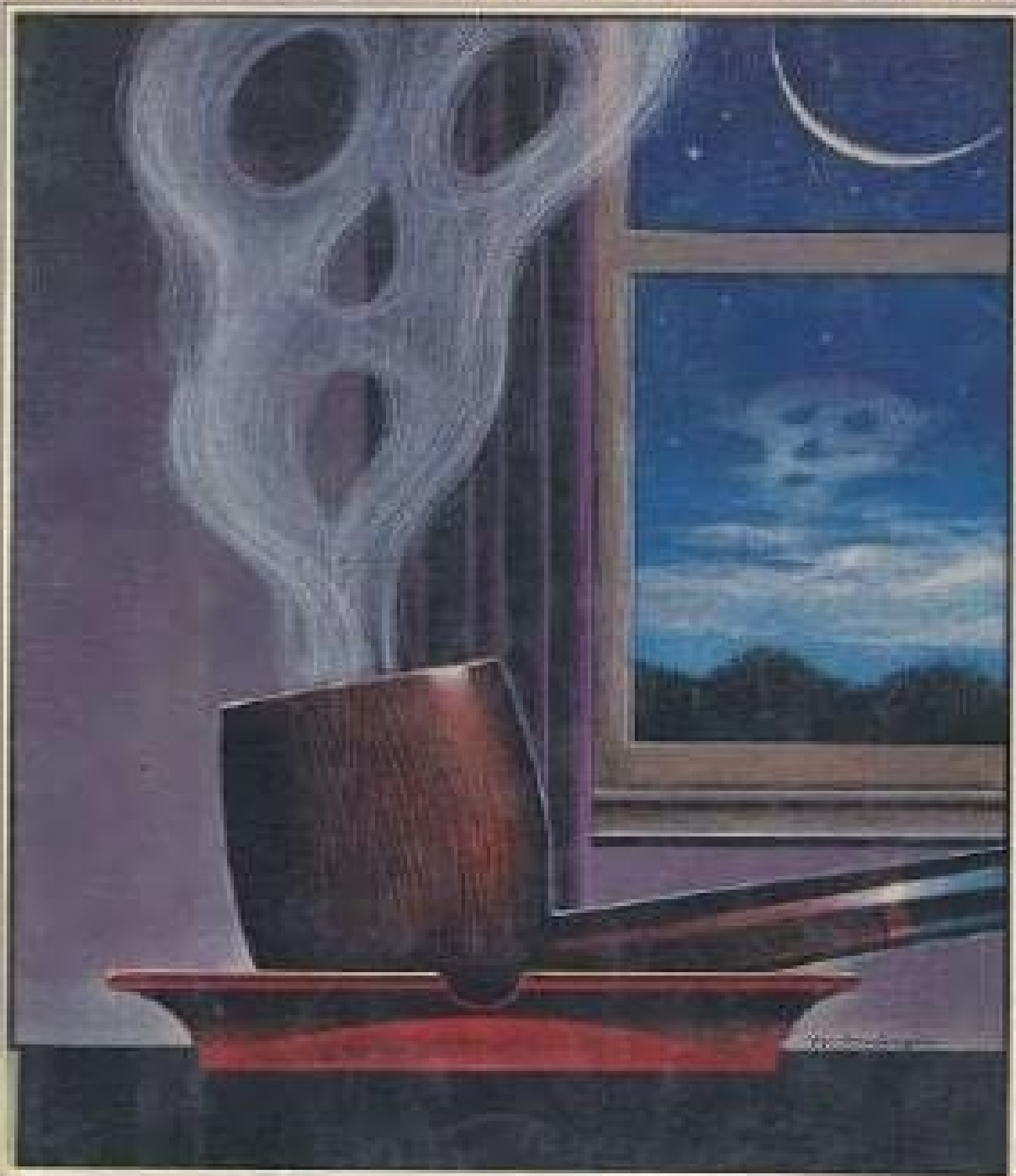


SIMENON

MAIGRET'S WAR OF NERVES



Maigret's War Of Nerves

*LA TÊTE D'UN HOMME [L'HOMME DE LA
TOUR EIFFEL]*

*THE 5TH EPISODE IN THE MAIGRET SAGA
1930*

Georges Simenon

translated by Geoffrey Sainsbury

3S XHTML EDITION 1.0

SCAN NOTES AND PROOFING HISTORY

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A HELEN AND KURT WOLFF BOOK

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Maigret's War of Nerves

1

CELL NUMBER 11



Somewhere in Santé Prison a clock struck two. The condemned man was sitting on his bed. His large knotty hands gripped his knees.

For a minute, perhaps, he sat there quite still, tense, listening. Then with a sigh he stretched his limbs and stood up in the cell, huge, awkward, head too large, arms too long, chest hollow. His face expressed nothing except a dull, blank stupidity, or perhaps inhuman callousness. Nevertheless, before reaching the door he shook his fist at one of the walls.

On the other side of this wall was a cell just like his, one of a row of cells in that section of Santé known as the Grande Surveillance, maximum security.

In this cell, as in four of the others, a condemned man was waiting. Waiting either for reprieve or for that solemn group who would come one night and wake him without so much as a word.

And for the last five days, every hour and every minute, this prisoner had groaned. Sometimes it was a dull monotonous whine, sometimes cries, tears, or shouts of fury. Number 11 had never seen him, nor did he know anything about him. All he could guess from his voice was that he was quite young.

Just now the groans were tired, almost mechanical in their persistence. And a spark of hatred flashed into Number 11's eyes as he clenched that knotty fist.

From all around, from the corridors and yards of the fortress of Santé Prison, from the streets that skirted it, from the more distant quarters of Paris, there came no sound.

Nothing but the groaning of Number 13.

Number 11 tugged at one of his fingers spasmodically, shivered, shivered again, then reached for the handle of the

door.

The cell was lighted, according to the regulations for the Grande Surveillance. Normally, a guard would be in the corridor looking hour by hour into the five cells of the condemned men. A spasm of anxiety shook Number 11 as he tried the handle. It was a fateful moment.

The door opened. The guard's chair was there, empty.

The man started walking quickly, dizzily, bending low. His face was dead white. Yet the eyelids of his greenish eyes were reddened.

Three times he turned around, because he had lost his way and come to locked doors. At the end of a corridor he heard voices. A group of guards were talking and smoking.

At last he went out into a courtyard, the darkness of which was pierced here and there by a circle of light from one of the lamps. A hundred yards away, a man on guard duty was walking up and down by a gate. In another direction, a window was lighted up, and a man could be seen smoking a pipe, bent over a desk littered with papers.

Number 11 would have liked to consult the note he had found three days before, tucked in with his food, but he had swallowed it, as the writer had told him to. An hour ago he had known it by heart, but now parts of it were slipping from his memory.

On October 15th at two in the morning you will find the door of your cell unlocked and the guard busy elsewhere. If you follow these instructions...

He ran a burning hand across his brow, shot a terrified glance from one lamp to the next, and nearly cried out when he heard steps. But they were on the other side of the prison wall. Free people talking to one another, while their footsteps rang out on the sidewalk.

“When I think of their having the nerve to charge fifty francs for a seat...”

It was a woman's voice.

“Oh, you know, they have a lot of expenses,” answered a man.

The prisoner felt along the wall, stopped when he kicked a stone, and listened, so white, so unnatural with his absurdly long arms groping in the empty air, that in any other place you would have taken him for a drunk.

They were hardly fifty paces from the invisible prisoner, a little group gathered in a recess by a door leading to some offices.

Inspector Maigret leaned against the dark brick wall. His hands stuffed in his overcoat pockets, he stood so stonily on his strong legs and kept so still that he seemed a lifeless mass. But at regular intervals came the wheezing of his pipe, and somehow you could guess the anxiety that he could not keep out of his eyes.

Ten times at least he had to nudge the examining magistrate, Monsieur Comélieau, to stop his fidgeting. The latter had arrived at one o'clock, from some reception or other. He was in evening dress, his thin mustache carefully brushed up, his complexion redder than usual.

Besides these two was a third person, Monsieur Grassier, the governor of Santé. With a sulky expression on his face, his coat collar turned up, he pretended to take no interest in what was going on.

It was more than chilly, and the man on guard duty stamped to warm his feet. At each breath a fine cloud was blown into the air.

They could not see Number 11, who avoided the circles of light. But, in spite of his care to make no noise, they could hear him moving and could more or less make out what he was doing.

After ten minutes, the examining magistrate leaned over to Maigret and opened his mouth to speak. But the inspector gripped his shoulder with such force that he held his tongue, sighed, and mechanically took out a cigarette, which was promptly whisked out of his hand.

All three had understood. Number 11 had lost his bearings, and at any minute might be discovered by someone making the rounds.

And they could do nothing about it. They couldn't very well take him by the hand and lead him to the knotted rope that hung down the wall, beneath which was the bundle of clothes.

Sometimes a car passed along the street. Sometimes voices came over, echoing strangely in the prison yard.

The three men could only exchange glances. Those of the governor were angry, sarcastic, savage. As for Com  liau, his nervousness was increasing every minute. Maigret was the only one to keep his composure and his confidence, but it was only by an effort of will. In daylight you would have noticed that his forehead was glistening with sweat.

When the half hour struck, the man was still wandering around. And then suddenly they were conscious of his feverish haste as he stumbled on the bundle of clothes and felt for the rope.

The guard's steps still tapped out the passage of time. The examining magistrate could not help risking a whisper:

"You're quite sure..."

But Maigret shut him up with a look. There was the faintest sound as the rope stretched, and they could just make out a pale splotch against the wall—the face of Number 11 as he hauled himself up hand over hand.

What a long time he took! Ten times, twenty times as long as they would have thought possible. And when he got to the top, it looked as though he'd throw his hand in after all, for he did not move.

They could see him clearly now, in silhouette, lying flat on the coping.

What was the matter? Why didn't he get down the other side? Were there people around? A couple of lovers, perhaps, hugging each other under the wall?

Comélieau was almost beside himself with impatience, and the governor said in a low voice:

“I suppose you don’t need me any longer.”

But at last the rope was hauled up and lowered down the other side. The man disappeared. Comélieau could contain himself no longer.

“If I did not have such confidence in you, Inspector, I would never have got mixed up in such a business as this, I assure you. Don’t forget, I still think Heurtin guilty... And now, suppose he slips through your fingers?”

“Shall I see you tomorrow?” was all Maigret answered.

“I’ll be in my office by ten.”

They shook hands in silence, the governor grudgingly. And he muttered something as he slouched off.

Maigret stopped a few moments by the wall. It was only when he heard somebody running for all he was worth that he walked to the gate. He nodded to the man on duty, gave a look into the empty street, and turned the corner of Rue Jean-Dolent.

“Gone?” he asked, speaking to a figure flattened against the wall.

“Toward Boulevard Arago. Dufour and Janvier are on his heels.”

“You can go to bed.”

And Maigret absent-mindedly shook his inspector’s hand and walked off ponderously, head lowered, lighting his pipe.

It was four o’clock before he pushed open the door of his office on Quai des Orfèvres. With a sigh he took off his overcoat, gulped down half a glass of lukewarm beer that was standing among the papers on his desk, and sank back into his chair.

In front of him was a file bulging with documents. On it, one of the clerks of the Police Judiciaire had written in a beautiful hand: *Affaire Heurtin*.

He had to wait three hours. The unshaded electric bulb floated in a cloud of tobacco smoke, which drifted this way and that with the slightest movement of the air. From time to time Maigret got up to poke the fire in the stove; then he would go back to his seat, discarding something on the way: his jacket, his collar, and finally his vest.

The telephone was by his hand, and at six he picked up the receiver to make sure they had not forgotten to connect him to the local exchange.

The yellow file was open. Police reports, newspaper clippings, reports of the trial, and photographs had gradually spread over his desk. Maigret surveyed them from a distance. Now and again he would pick up a document, not so much to read it as to help him focus his thoughts.

The case was summed up by a headline running across two columns of a newspaper:

JOSEPH HEURTIN, MURDERER OF MME
HENDERSON AND HER MAID, CONDEMNED TO
DEATH THIS MORNING

And Maigret smoked incessantly, anxiously watching the telephone, which was so obstinately mute. At ten past six the bell rang, but it was only a wrong number.

Leaning back in his chair, the inspector could read passages in the various documents before him. But he knew them by heart.

Joseph Jean-Marie Heurtin, born at Melun, 27, rides a three-wheel vehicle, delivering flowers for M. Gérardier, florist, Rue de Sèvres...

There was his photograph, taken a year before at the fair at Neuilly. A tall young man with a pale face, triangular head, and abnormally long arms, dressed in clothes that showed cheap affectation.

Savage crime at Saint-Cloud. Rich American woman stabbed to death. Maid also killed.

That was in July.

Maigret brushed aside the horrible photographs that had been taken on the spot: the two bodies viewed from every angle, blood everywhere, faces convulsed, nightgowns in disorder, torn and bloodstained.

Inspector Maigret of the Police Judiciaire has now cleared up the Saint-Cloud mystery. The murderer is in custody.

He rummaged among the papers spread out in front of him and unearthed the newspaper clipping dated only ten days before.

JOSEPH HEURTIN, MURDERER OF MME
HENDERSON AND HER MAID, CONDEMNED TO
DEATH THIS MORNING

In the yard below a police van was disgorging its harvest of the night, mostly women. Steps could be heard from time to time in the corridors, and the mist over the Seine began to lift.

The telephone rang.

“Hello! Dufour?”

“Yes, Chief. Dufour speaking.”

“Well?”

“Nothing... at least... If you like, I’ll stay here too... But for the moment Janvier’s quite enough.”

“Where are you?”

“At the Citanguette.”

“At what?”

“Citanguette—a café near Issy-les-Moulineaux. I’ll jump in a taxi and come tell you all about it.”

Maigret paced up and down after sending the office messenger to get some coffee and croissants from the café around the corner.

He was just starting to eat when Dufour entered, a meticulous, dapper little man, in a gray suit and high, very starched collar, and with an air of mystery that was special to him.

“First of all, what’s this Citanguette?” growled Maigret. “Sit down.”

“A café for bargemen on the Left Bank, between Grenelle and Issy-les-Moulineaux...”

“Did he go straight there?”

“Heavens, no. And it’s a miracle he didn’t shake us off, Janvier and me.”

“Have you had any breakfast?”

“Yes, at the Citanguette.”

“All right, then, tell me about it.”

“You saw him get away, didn’t you? Well, he started to run as though he was scared stiff of being caught again. He didn’t feel safe till he got to the lion of Belfort, which he stood and gaped at.”

“Did he know he was being followed?”

“Certainly not. He never turned around once.”

“Then?”

“Only a blind man could have gone the way he did, or someone who didn’t know one end of Paris from the other. He suddenly darted into the street that runs along the cemetery—I’ve forgotten its name. Not a soul around. Pretty grim. Obviously he didn’t realize where he was till he saw the tombstones behind the railings. Then he started running again...”

“Go on.” Maigret, munching a croissant, seemed already reassured.

“We got into Montparnasse. The big cafés were shut, of course, but one or two of the smaller ones were open. I remember he stopped in front of one. You could hear jazz being played inside. A flower girl went up to him, with her basket of flowers, and he moved on.”

“In which direction?”

“One might really say in no direction at all. First he walked down Boulevard Raspail, then he turned back by a side street and stumbled on the Gare Montparnasse.”

“What did he look like?”

“Like nothing at all. Just the same as when he was charged, and at the trial. Absolutely pale... and that vague, frightened look... I really can’t describe it... Then half an hour later we were over on the other side of the river, by the Palais-Royal...”

“And nobody had spoken to him?”

“Nobody.”

“And he couldn’t have mailed a note?”

“I could swear he didn’t. Janvier followed along one side of the street, I on the other. We never lost sight of him for a moment... He stopped once by a stall where they were selling hot sausages and fried potatoes. He seemed to hesitate. But a policeman was strolling in his direction, and off he went again.”

“Did he seem to be trying to find some address?”

“Not at all. He looked much more like a drunk drifting around wherever his legs happened to take him. We got back to the Seine by way of Place de la Concorde, and then he took it into his head to follow the river. Two or three times he sat down...”

“What on?”

“Once on the stone parapet. Another time on a seat. And that time, though I couldn’t swear to it, he seemed to be crying. At any rate, he had his head in his hands.”

“There was no one else on the seat?”

“No one. Then on we went again. Just think of it—all the way to Moulineaux ! Now and then he stopped to look at the water. A few barges were passing up and down. Then the streets began to fill with workmen. And he just walked and walked, like a man who hasn’t the slightest idea of getting anywhere.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing. But, wait a moment! By Pont Mirabeau he put his hand casually in his pocket and fished something out.”

“The ten-franc note.”

“That’s what we thought. Then he looked around. Obviously looking for a café. But on the Right Bank there was nothing open. So he crossed over. And in a little bar for drivers he had a cup of coffee and a glass of rum.”

“The Citanguette?”

“Not yet. Not by a long way. My legs were aching, and so were Janvier’s. And no chance of *our* getting a drink to warm us up! He started off again, first this way, then that. Janvier wrote down all the streets and can tell you exactly. Then once more we were back by the river, near a big factory. Not a soul around...

“There were two scrap piles, and between them some stunted trees and grass—quite countrified. A crane on the quay, and some barges lying alongside, perhaps as many as twenty...

“As for the Citanguette, it’s a place you’d hardly expect to find there. A little bar where they serve food too. On the right there’s a shed with a player piano, and a notice: ‘Dancing every Saturday and Sunday.’

“The fellow had some more coffee and another glass of rum. Then they brought him some sausages, after making him wait a long time... He spoke to the man there, and a quarter of an hour later they both went upstairs...

“When the proprietor came down again, I went in and asked him straight out if he rented rooms. He answered:

“ ‘Why? Is there something wrong about him?’

“A man who’s obviously had business with the police already. There was no sense in beating around the bush. Much better get him scared. So I told him point blank that if he breathed a word to his customer, I’d have his place shut up.

“He had no idea who he was sheltering. I’m quite sure of that. His customers are mostly bargemen, and at twelve o’clock the workmen from the factory come in for a drink...”

“It seems that when Heurtin was taken upstairs he threw himself on the bed without even stopping to take his boots off. When the owner objected, he took them off and threw them on the floor. Then he went right off to sleep.”

“Is Janvier there now?” asked Maigret.

“Yes. He’s staying. You can call him up. The Citanguette has a telephone, on account of the skippers, who often have to get in touch with their owners.”

Maigret lifted the receiver, and a few moments later Janvier was at the other end of the line. “Hello! What’s he doing?”

“Sleeping.”

“Nothing suspicious?”

“Nothing... Quiet as a church here. From the bottom of the stairs I can hear him snoring.”

Maigret hung up and stared at Dufour, scrutinizing his slender person from head to foot. “You won’t let him get away?” he asked. Dufour opened his mouth to protest, but the inspector laid a hand on his shoulder and went on still more seriously:

“Listen, old man. I know you’ll do all you can. But my position’s at stake. Other things too. And I can’t watch him myself, because the fellow knows me.”

“I swear, Inspector...”

“Don’t swear. Now get along with you.”

Maigret turned abruptly to his desk, gathered up the straggling documents, and shoved the file into a drawer.

“And mind, if you need more men, don’t hesitate to ask for them.”

Joseph Heurtin’s photograph was still lying on the desk, and Maigret looked once again at the bony skull, the protruding ears, the wide colorless lips.

Three mental experts had examined the man. Two had declared:

Of limited intelligence. Fully responsible for his actions.

Only the third, called by the defense, had cautiously put forward:

Some congenital deficiency. Responsibility subnormal.

And Maigret, who had arrested Joseph Heurtin, had declared to the police commissioner, to the public prosecutor, and to the examining magistrate:

“Either he’s mad or he’s innocent.”

And he had set out to prove it.

He could hear Dufour’s retreating steps sounding along the corridor.

2

THE SLEEPING MAN



It was eleven o’clock when Maigret arrived at Auteuil. He had had a short interview with Monsieur Comélieau, trying in vain to reassure him.

It was a wretched day, the gray clouds only just above the roofs. It was dirty underfoot. Blocks of luxury apartments looked down on him as he walked along the quay, whereas on the other side the scene was typical of Paris suburbs—factories, empty spaces, wharves with stacks of goods of every description.

Between these contrasting banks flowed the Seine, leaden-gray, its surface ruffled by passing barges.

Even from that distance it was easy to spot the Citanguette, because it stood all by itself in the middle of a stretch of property littered with junk of all sorts: piles of bricks, rolls of roofing, scrapped cars, and even railway track.

It was a two-story building, painted an ugly red, with three tables outside. Some dockers came out. They must have been

unloading cement, because they were white from head to foot. As they left they shook hands with a man wearing a blue apron, presumably the proprietor; then they strolled down toward one of the lighters moored alongside.

Maigret's features were drawn, his eyes dull, but that was not due to a sleepless night. He would often let himself go like this. Each time, after pursuing his quarry furiously, his spirit would sag when at last it was within easy reach.

It was a sort of staleness that he could not shake off. He picked out a hotel looking straight across at the Citanguette, and went in.

"I want a room facing the river."

"By the month?"

He shrugged his shoulders. He was not in the mood for arguing.

"For as long as I like. Police Judiciaire!"

"We have nothing free."

"All right. Pass me the register."

"As a matter of fact... Wait a moment. I must just find out whether Number 18..."

"Fool," muttered Maigret between his teeth.

Naturally, they gave him the room. It was a high-class hotel. The porter asked him:

"Is there any luggage to bring?"

"Nothing. Just get me some field glasses."

"But... I don't know if..."

"Go on. Find me some field glasses. I don't care where."

He took off his overcoat with a sigh, opened the window, and filled his pipe. In less than five minutes he was brought some mother-of-pearl opera glasses.

"The manageress can lend you these. But she says will you..."

“Thanks. Clear out.”

He already knew the front of the Citanguette by heart, down to the smallest detail.

One window was open upstairs. Through it he could see a rumpled bed, a huge eiderdown slipping off one side, some carpet slippers on a sheepskin mat. The proprietor's room.

To one side was another window, this one shut. Then a third, which was open and at which a stout woman in a camisole was doing her hair. The mistress, or perhaps the maid.

Below, the man in the blue apron was wiping the tables. At one of them Dufour was sitting, with a glass of red wine in front of him.

The two men were evidently talking.

Farther off, down on the stone quay, a fair young man in a raincoat and a gray cap was apparently watching the dockers unload the cargo of cement.

It was Janvier, one of the youngest members of the Police Judiciaire.

In Maigret's room there was a telephone by the bedside. He lifted the receiver.

“Hello! Is this the office?”

“Can I do anything for you?”

“Yes. Put me through to that place opposite, on the other side of the river. The Citanguette.”

“Very good,” answered a prim voice.

It took a long time. But at last Maigret saw the owner drop his dustcloth and open a door. Then the bell rang in Maigret's room.

“You're through.”

“Hello! Is this the Citanguette?... Will you please ask your customer to speak to me?... Yes. You can't make a mistake, since there's only one.”

Looking out the window, he could see the bewildered man go up to Dufour, who at once went to the telephone.

“Is that you?”

“Yes, Chief.”

“I’m over on the other side, in the hotel you can see from where you are. What’s our man doing?”

“Sleeping.”

“Have you seen him?”

“A little while ago I listened at the door. I could hear him snoring, so I opened the door a little and peeped in. He was lying all crumpled up, still in his clothes.”

“You’re sure the proprietor hasn’t tipped him off?”

“He’s much too frightened of the police. He’s already been in trouble, and they threatened to cancel his license. So he’s on his best behavior now.”

“How many exits are there?”

“Two. The main entrance, and a back door into the yard behind. Janvier’s covering that one.”

“No one’s been upstairs?”

“No one. And no one can go up without my seeing them, because the stairs are in the bar itself, behind the counter.”

“Good! Have your dinner over there. I’ll call again later. Try to look like somebody in the shipping business.”

Maigret hung up and dragged an armchair over to the open window. Feeling cold there, he put on his coat again.

The girl in the office below called up to find out if he had finished his call.

“Yes. I’ve finished. Send me up some beer. And some tobacco.”

“We haven’t got any tobacco.”

“Well, you can send for some.”

At three in the afternoon he was still in the same place, his glasses on his knee and an empty beer glass by his side. In spite of the open window, the room reeked of tobacco smoke.

On the floor beside him were the morning papers, with an official announcement headlined:

CONDEMNED MAN ESCAPES FROM SANTÉ

And from time to time Maigret shrugged his shoulders, crossed and uncrossed his legs.

At half past three, Dufour called from the Citanguette.

“Any news?” asked Maigret.

“No. He’s still asleep.”

“What is it, then?”

“The Quai des Orfèvres called me to ask where you were. It seems the examining magistrate wants to speak to you at once.”

This time Maigret did not shrug his shoulders, but gave a good strong oath. Then he hung up and put through an urgent call to Monsieur Comélieau. He knew very well what the latter had to say.

“Is that you, Inspector? At last! Nobody could tell me where you were. But at the Quai des Orfèvres they told me you had posted your men at the Citanguette, so I told them to find out from there.”

“What is it?”

“First of all, have you any news?”

“Nothing at all. The man’s asleep.”

“You’re quite sure? He’s not got away?”

“With a little exaggeration, I might say that I can actually see him sleeping at this moment.”

“You know, I’m beginning to regret having...”

“Having taken my advice? But since the minister of justice himself agreed...”

“Wait a moment... The morning papers published your communiqué...”

“Yes. I’ve seen them.”

“But have you seen the evening papers?... No? Well, just get hold of the *Sifflet*. Of course I know it’s a scurrilous rag. But all the same... Wait a moment. Don’t hand up... Are you there? Here it is: an article in the *Sifflet* under the heading ‘Reasons of State.’ Are you listening, Maigret? I’ll read it:

“A semiofficial announcement was made in this morning’s papers to the effect that Joseph Heurtin, condemned to death by the Seine Assizes and awaiting execution in Santé, in the Grande Surveillance, had escaped under inexplicable circumstances.

“We are in a position to add that these circumstances are not inexplicable to everybody.

“As a matter of fact, Joseph Heurtin did not escape. He was made to escape. And this on the eve of his execution.

“We are not yet in a position to give the details of the odious comedy that was played last night in Santé, but we are able to state that it was the police officials themselves, in concert with the judicial authorities, who presided over this pseudo-escape.

“Is Joseph Heurtin aware of the fact?

“If not, we can find no words strong enough to condemn this operation, almost unique in the annals of criminal justice.”

Maigret listened without turning a hair. At the other end of the line the examining magistrate’s voice quavered.

“What do you say to that?”

“It only shows I’m right. The *Sifflet* people did not find that out all by themselves. And it wasn’t one of the men who were in on the secret who told them. It can only have been...”

“Who?”

“I’ll tell you this evening. Things are going splendidly, Monsieur Comélieau.”

“You think so? And suppose all the other papers reprint this stuff?”

“That’ll make a scandal.”

“You see...”

“Is a man’s head worth a scandal?”

Five minutes later he was phoning Police Headquarters.

“Is that you, Lucas? Look here, old man. Run around to the office of *Sifflet*, on Rue Montmartre. Get the editor by himself. Put the screws on. A little intimidation. We’ve got to know who gave him that information about the escape from Santé. I’d bet my last franc he got a note somehow this morning. Get hold of it, and bring it here to me. Understand?”

“Have you finished?” asked the girl below.

“No, mademoiselle. Put me through to the Citanguette.”

And a minute or two later Dufour was saying:

“Still asleep. I was up there just now for a quarter of an hour, listening at the door. And in his sleep I heard him mutter: ‘*Maman*’ ”

Though his glasses showed him nothing through the closed window on the second floor of the Citanguette, Maigret could visualize the sleeper almost as clearly as if he were there.

Yet he had made his acquaintance only in July, that day when, less than forty-eight hours after the Saint-Cloud murders, he had laid a hand on the young man’s shoulder, saying quietly:

“Come along now! Don’t let’s have any nonsense.”

It was on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, in the modest hotel where Joseph Heurtin occupied a room on the sixth floor.

The proprietress had said of him:

“A well-behaved, quiet young man. Hardworking too. He may look a little strange at times, but...”

“Did he ever have visitors?”

“Never. And, except just lately, he never came in after midnight.”

“And lately?”

“Two or three times he came in later. Once—that was Wednesday—he knocked to get in just before four o’clock.”

That Wednesday night was when the murders had been committed. The pathologists had said that the two women had died about two o’clock.

But even without that, there was abundant evidence of Heurtin’s guilt. And it was Maigret himself, more than anybody, who had collected it.

The house was on the road to Saint-Germain, about half a mile from the Pavilion Bleu, which Heurtin had entered at midnight and drunk four glasses of grog one after the other. When he paid, he dropped a used single third-class ticket from Paris to Saint-Cloud.

Mrs. Henderson had been alone since the death of her husband, an American diplomat whose connections included some of the great financial families in the States. Since his death, the ground floor of the house had not been used; the old lady lived upstairs.

She had only one servant, who was really more of a companion. This was Elise Chatrier, a French girl of good education who had spent her childhood in England.

Twice a week a gardener came from Saint-Cloud to look after the garden.

There were few visitors. Occasionally, at long intervals, a nephew, William Kirby, would come with his wife.

And that July night—it was the 7th—cars raced past as usual along the main road to Deauville. At one in the morning the Pavilion Bleu and the other restaurants and cafés shut their doors.

A motorist, who stopped for a moment near the Hendersons’, subsequently informed the police that at about half past two he had seen a light upstairs in the house and a

shadow silhouetted against the blinds, which struck him as odd.

In the morning, at six, the gardener arrived, as he always did on Thursdays. He used to go quietly to work, and then at eight o'clock Elise Chatrier would call him in to have some coffee.

But at eight o'clock there was no sign of life, nor at nine. Becoming anxious, he knocked, and when there was no answer he got a policeman.

Then the crime was discovered. In Mrs. Henderson's room, the old lady's body was sprawled across the carpet, her nightgown soaked with blood, a dozen knife wounds in her chest.

Elise Chatrier had met the same fate in the next room. Mrs. Henderson liked to have her nearby, in case she was taken ill during the night.

A double murder of the most savage kind, a typical example of what the police call "a dirty crime."

And traces everywhere. Footprints, bloody fingermarks on the curtains and all over the place.

The usual routine: arrival of the examining magistrate, the police pathologists, and photographers, and so on. The usual analysis and post-mortems.

Maigret was put in charge of the case, and it did not take him long to get on Heurtin's track.

It was so clearly marked. There was no carpet in the hallways and the floors were waxed. The photographs showed prints of exceptional clarity.

They were of rubber soles, absolutely new. The nonslip ridges were quite distinctive, and the maker's name and a number were clearly legible.

A few hours later, Maigret entered a shoeshop on Boulevard Raspail, where he learned that shoes of that description and size had been sold within the last two weeks.

"Wait a moment. It was a fellow with a three-wheeler. We often see him around here."

And a few more hours brought the inspector to the florist's on Rue de Sèvres, where he questioned Monsieur Gérardier; an hour later he found the shoes themselves, on Joseph Heurtin's feet.

It remained only to compare the fingerprints. The experts bent over them with their lenses. Their verdict was immediate:

"That's the fellow."

"What did you do it for?"

"I didn't kill anybody."

"Who gave you Madame Henderson's address?"

"I didn't kill anybody."

"What were you doing in the house at two o'clock in the morning?"

"I don't know."

"How did you get back from Saint-Cloud?"

"I didn't get back from Saint-Cloud!" A large head, pale face, great bumps on the skull. And his eyelids were red, like those of a man who hasn't slept for days and days.

In his room on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince they found a bloodstained handkerchief, and the experts said it was human blood. And they even found certain bacilli on it that were also on Mrs. Henderson's. "I didn't kill anybody."

"What lawyer would you like?"

"I don't want a lawyer."

They gave him one all the same, Maître Joly, a young man just turned thirty, who racked his brains to find some kind of defense.

They put him under observation for a week, and the specialists reported:

"No signs of degeneracy. The man is fully responsible for his actions in spite of his present prostration, which is the result of a severe nervous shock."

It was during the summer vacation period. Maigret was sent off on a case in Deauville. The examining magistrate, Comélieau, found the case clear enough; so did the public prosecutor. But the fact remained that Heurtin had stolen nothing and had apparently nothing whatever to gain by the death of either of the victims.

Maigret had routed out all he could about his past. He could claim to know him morally and physically at every age.

He was born in Melun, where his father was a waiter at the Hôtel de la Seine and his mother a washerwoman. Three years later his parents started off on their own, with a little café. But business was not good, and they moved to Nandy, in Seine-et-Marne, where they had an inn. When Joseph was six, a sister, Odette, was born.

Maigret had a photograph of a naked baby lying on a bearskin, its pudgy arms and legs waving in the air; while squatting in the foreground in a sailor suit was Joseph.

At thirteen he was looking after the horses and helping to serve the customers. At seventeen he was a waiter in a fancy hotel in Fontainebleau. At twenty-one, having finished his military service, he settled in Paris, on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince, and delivered flowers for Monsieur Gérardier.

“He read a lot,” said Monsieur Gérardier.

“His only entertainment was to go to the movies,” said his landlady.

But there was nothing that had the least bearing on the house at Saint-Cloud.

“Had you ever been to Saint-Cloud before?”

“Never.”

“What did you do on Sundays?”

“I used to read.”

Mrs. Henderson was not a customer of Monsieur Gérardier's. There was nothing to attract a burglar to that house rather than to a hundred others. And, anyhow, nothing had been stolen.

“Why don’t you speak out?”

“I have nothing to say.”

For a whole month Maigret was at Deauville, rounding up a gang of international crooks, and it was not till September that he saw Heurtin again, in his cell in Santé. He found him utterly prostrated.

“I don’t know anything. I didn’t kill anybody.”

“But you were at Saint-Cloud all right.”

“Leave me alone.”

The prosecution thought it was plain sailing. The case was scheduled to open the autumn session of the Seine Assizes, on October 1st.

Maître Joly had only one line of defense, to call an expert witness to pronounce on the state of Heurtin’s mind. And this expert had said:

“Responsibility subnormal.”

To which the prosecution had replied:

“A dirty crime. If the accused didn’t steal anything, it was because something cropped up to disturb him. The experts have counted as many as *eighteen knife wounds*.”

They passed around the photographs of the victims, which the jury hardly glanced at, turning away in disgust.

“Yes” to all questions.

Sentence of death. And the next day Joseph Heurtin was transferred to a cell in the Grande Surveillance, where four others were waiting the same end.

Maigret was annoyed with him.

“You’ve nothing to say to me?” he asked.

“Nothing.”

“You know what you’re in for?”

And Heurtin wept quietly, his face pale as ever, his eyes red.

“Who’s your accomplice?”

“I haven’t got one.”

And every day Maigret returned, though strictly speaking he no longer had any right to interfere. Every day he found Heurtin prostrated, but calm. He never trembled, and now and again there was a glint of a sneer in his eyes...

Until the day he heard steps in the next cell and piercing shrieks. They had come for Number 9, a parricide.

Next day Heurtin, now Number 11, was sobbing. But still he wouldn’t speak. He lay stretched full length on the bed, his face turned to the wall, his teeth chattering.

When Maigret got an idea in his head, it was not easily eradicated. And he went to Comélieau.

“Either he’s mad or he’s innocent,” he said.

“It’s impossible. Besides, the case can’t be reopened now.”

Maigret stood there, five feet eleven, broad-shouldered, powerful. He held his ground.

“You know we could never find out how he got back from Saint-Cloud to Paris. He didn’t go by train. That’s proved. Nor by streetcar. And he certainly didn’t walk.”

Monsieur Comélieau scoffed, but Maigret remained unshaken.

“Would you like to try an experiment?”

“You must ask the Ministry.”

And Maigret, ponderous, obstinate, went to the Ministry of Justice. He had prepared a note for the condemned man telling him how to get away.

“Look here. If he had accomplices, he’ll think the message comes from them; if he hadn’t, he’ll be suspicious, thinking it’s a trap of some sort. I’ll make myself personally responsible for him. I guarantee that whatever happens he won’t get out of our clutches.”

It was interesting to watch the inspector’s face, heavy, placid, and yet hard. And that went on for three days. He played on their feelings by talking of a miscarriage of justice

and of the scandal there would be when it one day came to light.

“But it was you who arrested him.”

“As a policeman, I am bound to draw the logical conclusion from material evidence.”

“And as a man?”

“I want moral proof.”

“So you think... ?”

“He’s either mad or innocent.”

“Why doesn’t he talk?”

“The experiment I am proposing will answer that for us.”

There were telephone calls and conferences.

“You’re risking your career, Inspector. Think it over.”

“I have thought it over.”

And the note was sent. The condemned man didn’t breathe a word about it, but for the last three days he ate with more appetite.

“You see, he’s not surprised,” said Maigret. “So he was expecting something of the sort. In other words, he had accomplices, who promised to get him out.”

“Unless he’s acting... And, once outside, there’s always a chance of his slipping through your fingers. Don’t forget: your career’s at stake, Inspector.”

“And a man’s head.”

So here was Maigret lounging in a leather armchair by the window of a hotel bedroom. Occasionally he turned his glasses on the Citanguette, where the dockers and workmen were drifting in for a drink.

On the quay, Janvier was trying hard to look natural doing nothing. Dufour had been eating small pork sausages with mashed potatoes—Maigret could see every detail— and was now drinking a calvados.

The window above was still shut.

“Get me the Citanguette, mademoiselle.”

“The line’s busy.”

“I don’t care. Clear it.”

And a moment or two later: “Is that you, Dufour?”

“Still sleeping,” answered a bored voice.

There was a knock on the door. It was Lucas, who coughed as he made his way through the cloud of pipe smoke.

3

THE EVENING PAPER



Got anything?”

Lucas sat down on the edge of the bed, after briefly touching the inspector’s hand.

“Yes, I’ve got something. But nothing very startling. The editor finally gave me the letter informing him of the Santé business. It reached him about ten o’clock.”

“Let’s see it.”

Lucas handed over a dirty piece of paper, heavily scored with blue pencil. For when it had reached the *Sifflet*, someone had simply crossed out a few passages, made necessary corrections, and sent it straight down to the composing room. There were also some typographical instructions and the initials of the linotype operator who had set it.

“A piece of notepaper with the top cut off,” observed Maigret. “No doubt to get rid of a printed heading.”

“Exactly. I thought so at once, and I thought it would most likely have been written in a café. I took it to Moers, who claims to know the notepaper of most of the cafés in Paris.”

“Could he spot it?”

“It didn’t take him ten minutes. This sheet came from the Coupole, on Boulevard Montparnasse. I’ve just been there.

Unfortunately, they have a thousand customers a day if they have one, and at least fifty ask for writing materials.”

“What does Moers say about the writing?”

“He wouldn’t say anything. Wants to have it back to study properly. In the meantime, if you’d like me to go back to the Coupole...”

But Maigret was staring at the Citanguette. The gates of the neighboring factory had been flung open to a stream of workmen, most of them on bicycles, who gradually disappeared into the gray twilight.

The bar of the Citanguette had a single electric lamp on, by the light of which the inspector could see the customers inside.

There were half a dozen of them at the zinc counter, and one or two of them were looking at Dufour rather suspiciously. Maigret passed the glasses to Lucas, who exclaimed a moment later:

“Hello! What’s he doing there? And isn’t that Janvier on the quay watching the water go by?”

Maigret did not answer. He took the glasses back and gazed through them. He could see the staircase, which ended in a turn just behind the counter. And on it at that moment two legs came into view. They stopped, then continued. Finally a figure came forward, and the light shone on the pale face of Joseph Heurtin.

At the same moment Maigret noticed an evening paper that had just been thrown on one of the tables.

“By the way, Lucas, do you know if the other evening papers have got that stuff from the *Sifflet*?”

“I haven’t seen any, but I should think they’re bound to, if only to annoy us.”

Maigret lifted the receiver again.

“Citanguette, mademoiselle, as quick as you can.”

For the first time since morning, Maigret was nervous. On the other side of the Seine, the proprietor was speaking to

Heurtin, presumably asking him what he wanted to drink.

Wouldn't the fugitive's first thought be to look at the paper lying there within reach of his hand?

"Hello! Hello! Yes. Ask him to speak to me at once." He could see Dufour get up and go into the telephone booth.

"Look here, old man. There's a paper lying on the table there. He must not read it. *On no account.* . ."

"Shall I... ?" but Maigret interrupted him.

"Quick! He's just sitting down. The paper's right under his nose."

Maigret was on his feet, all his muscles contracted. If Heurtin read that article, it would be the end of the scheme he had so laboriously concocted.

He could see Heurtin sit down on the seat against the wall, put his two elbows on the table, and take his head in his hands.

The proprietor went up and placed a drink in front of him. Dufour was going back to take the paper.

Lucas, though he did not know the details of the case, guessed what was afoot, and strained his eyes to try to follow what was happening. For a moment their view was obstructed by a barge that had just turned on its navigation lights, white, red, green, and was swinging around in the stream, blowing its siren wildly.

"That's done it," groaned Maigret as Heurtin casually picked up the paper, just as Dufour had nearly crossed the room. If the news was there, it would surely be on the front page. Would it catch his eye at once?

And would Dufour have enough presence of mind to deal with the situation?

Dufour got nearer, but—how typical!—before acting he couldn't help casting a look across the Seine toward the hotel where his chief was watching him.

Certainly he didn't look like the right man for the job. So small and neat, there in a bar jostling with rough dockers and

workmen from the factory.

Nevertheless, he went right up to Heurtin, holding out his hand. He must be saying:

“Pardon, monsieur, that’s my paper.”

The men at the counter turned around. Heurtin looked up with astonishment.

Dufour insisted, leaning over the table and taking hold of the paper. Lucas peered harder than ever, holding his breath. It was indeed the critical moment.

Heurtin got up slowly, like a man who does not yet know what he’s going to do. His left hand still gripped the newspaper; Dufour did not let go of it either.

Suddenly Heurtin’s free hand seized a siphon that was standing on the next table, and the thick, heavy glass came down on the inspector’s skull.

Janvier, by the riverside, was barely fifty yards away. But he heard nothing.

Dufour staggered back against the counter, breaking two glasses. Two men caught hold of his arms, while three others rushed at Heurtin. There must have been some hubbub, because Janvier at last stopped contemplating the lights reflected in the water. He turned his head sharply toward the Citanguette, and started walking to it, then broke into a run.

“Quick! Take a taxi,” said Maigret. “Get there as fast as you can.”

Lucas obeyed without enthusiasm. He knew he’d be too late. Even Janvier, who was on the spot...

Heurtin was struggling. He seemed to be shouting out something. Was he accusing Dufour of being a policeman? Anyhow, they let go of him for a moment, and he took advantage of his freedom to have a swipe at the electric light with the siphon he was still holding in his hand.

Maigret stood motionless, his two hands clenched on the railing that ran across outside the tall French windows. On the quay below a taxi started off. A match was struck in the

Citanguette, but it instantly went out again. In spite of the distance, Maigret was almost sure he heard a shot.

Interminable minutes. The taxi was across the bridge now, trundling along the rutty track on the other bank of the Seine. It was so slow that, when he was still two hundred yards from the Citanguette, Lucas jumped out and started running. Perhaps he had heard the shot.

A whistle blew. Lucas or Janvier summoning help. A candle in the bar was lighting up the dirty windows, on one of which was a notice, in white enamel letters, telling customers they could bring their own food: ON PEUT APPORTER SON MANGER, from which the M and the last R were missing. It also showed a group of figures bending over a form on the floor.

But the light was too dim, the figures too indistinct for Maigret to recognize them at that distance. With his eyes still glued to the Citanguette, he telephoned again. His voice had become toneless.

“Hello! Grenelle Police? Send some men quickly by car to surround the Citanguette. And if he tries to get away, arrest a tall man with a large head and pale face. And send for a doctor.”

Lucas was in the building now. The taxi had followed him and was drawn up in front of one of the windows, hiding part of the scene from Maigret’s view.

Standing on a chair, the proprietor put in a new electric bulb, and the place was once more bathed in crude light.

“Hello! Is that you, Inspector? Comélieau speaking. I’m calling from home. We’ve got people coming to dinner. And I just wanted to make sure...”

Maigret said nothing.

“Hello! Don’t cut me off. Are you there?”

“Yes.”

“Well?... I can hardly hear you. Have you seen the papers? They’ve all got the *Sifflet* story. I think we ought perhaps

to..."

Janvier ran out of the Citanguette and dashed around the corner to the right, disappearing into the darkness.

"But apart from that," went on Comélieau, "everything's all right, I suppose?"

"Everything's all right," said Maigret, and he hung up.

He was sweating all over. His pipe had fallen on the floor, and some glowing tobacco was burning the carpet.

"Hello! Citanguette please, mademoiselle."

"But I've just given you your number."

"I said Citanguette. Get it."

He could see their heads turn as the telephone rang over on the other side. The proprietor went to answer it, but Lucas pushed in front of him.

"Is that you, Inspector?"

"Yes," said Maigret dully. "He's got away, hasn't he?"

"Naturally."

"And Dufour?"

"I don't think it's serious. A scalp wound. He wasn't even knocked out."

"I've called out the Grenelle Police."

"They won't do any good. You know what it's like over here. All these wharves with their stacks of goods, then the factories, and the little lanes of Issy-les-Moulineaux..."

"Did somebody shoot?"

"There was a shot. But I can't make out who fired it. They're all bewildered here, quiet as lambs. They can't figure out what's going on."

A car appeared. Two policemen got out. Another two were dropped a hundred yards farther on. Then four got out at the Citanguette, one making straight for the rear to guard the back door, following the usual routine.

“What shall I do?” asked Lucas.

“Nothing... Oh, well: organize a search, just in case... I’m coming over.”

“What about the doctor?”

“I’ve seen to that.”

The girl in the office, who saw to the telephone, before the big man looking down on her. Maigret was icy calm, his face so shut, so stony that it did not seem to be made of flesh at all.

“The bill, please.”

“You’re going?”

“The bill, please.”

“I’ll have to ask the manageress. How many telephone calls did you make? Just wait a moment, please...”

She got up from her chair, but Maigret seized her by the arm and sat her down again. Putting a hundred-franc note on the desk, he said:

“Is that enough?”

“I suppose so... Yes... But...”

He went out with a sigh, and walked along the sidewalk and over the bridge, with a slow stride that never quickened for a moment.

He tapped his pockets, feeling for his pipe, but it was not there. No doubt he regarded it as an evil omen, since his lips puckered into a bitter smile.

There were a few watermen around the Citanguette, but they did not seem unduly interested in what was going on. The previous week, two Arabs had knifed each other at the same place, and a month before that, a sack containing the trunk and legs of a woman had been fished out of the water with a boat hook.

The fancy apartments of Auteuil formed the horizon of the other bank of the Seine. A Métro train roared by over one of

the bridges. It was drizzling. Uniformed policemen came and went, turning their pale flashlights this way and that.

Lucas was the only man standing in the bar. The men who had witnessed or taken part in the scuffle were seated in a row against the wall. He was going from one to the other of them, examining their papers, while sour looks were turned on him.

Dufour had already been taken off in the police car, which was driven over the rough road as gently as possible.

Maigret said nothing. With his hands stuffed in his overcoat pockets, he merely stood there looking around him with an eye that seemed immeasurably heavy.

The proprietor started on an explanation:

“I swear, Inspector, I didn’t...”

Maigret shut him up with a stare and turned to an Arab sitting on the bench. The man went putty-colored as the inspector looked him over from head to foot.

“So you’ve got a job now?”

“At Citroën, yes... I...”

“For how much longer are you forbidden to be in the district?”

And Maigret made a sign to one of the policemen that meant: Off with him!

“Inspector,” whined the Arab as he was led toward the door, “let me explain... I haven’t done anything...”

But Maigret took no notice. There was a Pole whose papers were not in order: Off with him!

That was all. On the floor they found Dufour’s revolver, with a cartridge fired, the siphon, and splinters of glass from the lamp. The newspaper was torn, and two drops of blood had splashed on it.

“What shall we do with this bunch?” asked Lucas, who had finished looking at their papers.

“Let ’em go.”

A quarter of an hour later Janvier was back. He found Maigret sunk in a chair in a corner of the bar. Lucas was sitting near him. Janvier's boots and trousers were muddy, and there were dirty marks on his raincoat.

There was nothing to say. He sat down with the others.

Maigret's thoughts seemed far away. The proprietor stood behind the counter, looking very humble and contrite. Staring vaguely in his direction, Maigret said:

"Some rum."

And once again he felt for his pipe.

"Give me a cigarette," he said to Janvier with a sigh.

Janvier tried hard to find something to say. But he was too upset by the sight of his chief's hunched shoulders to think of anything. He blew his nose and looked away.

Meanwhile, the examining magistrate, Monsieur Comélieau, sat at the head of a table laid for twenty. After dinner there was to be dancing.

As for Dufour, he was lying on a steel table at a doctor's office in Grenelle. The latter slipped on a white coat while his instruments were being sterilized.

"Will it show?" asked the policeman, who could see nothing but the ceiling. "The skull's not broken, is it?"

"Good gracious, no. Nothing at all. Just a matter of a few stitches."

"And the hair will grow again?... Really? You're quite sure?"

HEADQUARTERS



Maigret listened stolidly. He never once made the least sign of protest or impatience.

With grave face and drawn features he listened humbly, respectfully, right to the end: only a little quiver of the Adam's apple at those passages that contained Monsieur Comélieau's most pungent strictures.

Thin, nervous, exasperated, the examining magistrate paced up and down his room. Sometimes his voice rose almost to a shout, so that his words were audible to the people waiting outside in the corridor.

Now and again he would pick up some object from his desk, fiddle with it for a few moments, then fling it down again. The clerk, embarrassed, looked the other way. And Maigret stood there, steadily, towering above the angry little man.

The latter, after a final gibe, looked into the inspector's face. But he quickly turned his head away; after all, Maigret was a man of forty-five who for over twenty years had been in the police, handling all sorts of cases, many of them extremely delicate.

And then... Well, he was a man!

"But haven't you anything to say?"

"I told my chief just now that I'll hand in my resignation in ten days' time if I don't lay hands on the murderer."

"In other words, if you don't lay hands on Joseph Heurtin..."

"Lay hands on the murderer," said Maigret simply.

The examining magistrate flared up again.

"Do you mean to tell me you still believe...?"

Maigret said nothing, and Comélieau, writhing with impatience, hastily added:

“Let’s leave it at that, or you’ll end by driving me out of my mind. As soon as you have anything to report, call me.”

Maigret took his leave and made his way along the familiar corridors. But instead of going down to the street, he climbed up to the top floor of the Palais de Justice, where he pushed open the door of the Forensic Laboratory.

One of the experts, suddenly seeing him, was so struck by his appearance that, as he held out his hand, he asked:

“Aren’t you well?”

“Quite all right, thanks.”

His eyes seemed to look at nothing. He kept his heavy black overcoat on, his hands in the pockets. He looked like someone who has returned from a long journey and is seeing a familiar spot with fresh eyes.

Nor did his manner change as he started to turn over some photographs taken the day before in an apartment that had been burgled. Then he read a report that one of his colleagues had asked for.

Over in a corner was a hairless young man, tall and weedy. He was nearsighted and wore thick-lensed glasses. He was watching Maigret with a look of pained surprise.

On his table were lenses of all shapes and sizes, delicate tools, bottles of ink and chemical reagents, also a screen of frosted glass that was lit up by a powerful electric bulb.

It was Moers, the specialist on papers, inks, and handwriting. He knew Maigret had come to see him, but the latter did not even look at him as he wandered aimlessly around the room.

At last he took out a pipe, lit it, and in a strained voice said:

“Well, now! Let’s get to work.”

Moers understood—he knew what the inspector was like—but he pretended not to notice.

Maigret took off his coat, yawned, worked the muscles of his face, as though to regain his normal self. He seized a chair,

took it over to the young man, and sat astride it, leaning over the back. In an affectionate tone he said:

“Well, little fellow?”

Some of the weight at least seemed to have fallen from his shoulders.

“Tell me all you can.”

“I spent last night studying the note. A pity it’s been mauled by so many people. Not the faintest use looking for fingerprints.”

“No. I didn’t expect any.”

“I stopped at the Coupole first thing this morning and examined all the inkpots. Do you know the place? There are several rooms: the big one, part of which is turned into a restaurant at mealtimes, then the one on the second floor; then there’s the terrace, and, last, a small place on the left, an American bar frequented chiefly by habitués.”

“I know.”

“Well, it was the ink belonging to that bar that was used to write the letter. The writing was done with the left hand, not by a left-handed person, but by somebody who knew that all left-handed writing looks very much alike.”

The letter that had been sent to the *Sifflet* still lay on the glass screen in front of Moers.

“One thing is certain: the writer is an intellectual, and I could swear that he speaks and writes several languages. But of course if I’m going to give you a portrait of him— that’s not strict science, you know.”

“Go on.”

“Well, either I’m very much mistaken or we’re dealing with an exceptional person. First of all, an intelligence far above the average. But what bothers me is the strange mixture of willpower and weakness, also of coldness and emotional capacity. It’s a man’s writing, yet I can see various traits that are definitely feminine.”

Moers was on his favorite ground. He positively glowed with pleasure. In spite of himself, Maigret could not help smiling slightly, and the young man hastily went on:

“Of course, I know all that’s not very convincing, and an examining magistrate would never hear me out... Just the same... For instance, I’d bet anything you like that the man who wrote that letter is the victim of a serious illness. And he knows it... If only he’d written with the right hand, I could have told you more... Oh, I’d forgotten—there are stains on the paper, though of course they might have been done at the newspaper. One of those spots is certainly café au lait. And one more thing—the top of the sheet was not cut off with a knife, but with something rounded, like a spoon.”

“In short, the letter was written yesterday morning in the bar of the Coupole by a polyglot customer who was probably drinking café au lait.”

Maigret got up and offered his hand.

“Thank you, my boy. Give me back the letter, will you?”

He grunted a general farewell and went out. When the door was shut, someone said, though not without a certain admiration:

“He’ll get it in the neck, if ever...”

But Moers, who was well known as a Maigret fan, glared at him, and the man stopped and went on with his analysis.

Paris wore its dismal mid-October aspect. A raw light fell from a sky that was like a dirty ceiling. The sidewalks still showed traces of the previous night’s rain. And the passers-by had the resentful look of people who were not yet used to the idea that summer was over.

Throughout the night typewriters had been busy at Police Headquarters. Orders had been distributed by hand to all the Paris police stations. Messages had been telegraphed all over the country telling gendarmerie, railway police, and customs officers to be on the lookout.

High and low, from one end of Paris to the other and in all the surrounding suburbs, uniformed men and plain-clothesmen

were on the prowl, scrutinizing every face in the hope of setting hands on a certain man. In the country, travelers on the main roads were stopped and asked for their papers. At the frontiers, people were surprised at being questioned more minutely than usual.

They were after Joseph Heurtin, condemned to death at the Seine Assizes, escaped from Santé, who had disappeared after a scuffle with a police inspector in a bar called the Citanguette.

“At the moment of his flight from the Citanguette he had about twenty-two francs left in his pocket,” said the information that had been circulated.

And Maigret’s solitary figure walked away from the Palais de Justice. But instead of going to his office on Quai des Orfèvres, he took a bus to the Bastille, and rang the bell of a third-floor apartment on Rue du Chemin-Vert.

The door was opened by Madame Dufour. Still busy with the housework, she had not yet had time to change. A smell of some surgical disinfectant mingled with that of boiled fowl.

“Ah! He will be pleased to see you,” she said.

In his room the inspector was lying in bed, looking sad and worried.

“Getting on, old man?”

“I suppose so. It seems, after all, that the hair won’t grow over the scar. I’ll be lucky if I don’t have to wear a wig.”

Maigret wandered around the room, as he had at the laboratory, like a man who doesn’t know what to do. Finally he muttered:

“Have you got a grudge against me?” Dufour’s wife, still young and pretty, was standing in the doorway.

“I’d like to see him having a grudge against you!” she said. “All morning he’s been saying he wondered how you were going to pull through. He wanted me to go to the post office to call you, since our line’s out of order this morning.”

“Oh, don’t worry. Things will straighten themselves out somehow or other,” answered Maigret.

His own home was only five hundred yards away, on Boulevard Richard Lenoir, but he did not go there. He started to walk. That's what he needed—to walk, to feel himself in the middle of a crowd that jostled him, indifferent to his worries.

Little by little, as he made his way through the streets, he lost the look of a guilty schoolboy. His features grew firmer. He smoked pipe after pipe, as in his best days.

Monsieur Comélieau would have been astonished, and no doubt indignant, had he known that the least of the inspector's worries was to recapture Joseph Heurtin.

For Maigret, that was a minor question. The escaped man was somewhere or other among a crowd of many millions. But Maigret felt pretty sure that, the day he needed him, he would put his hand on him almost at once.

No. His thoughts were centered on the letter written at the Coupole. And also, perhaps even more, on a question that he was annoyed with himself for having neglected at the time.

But in July everybody was so sure of Heurtin's guilt. Comélieau had taken the case in hand at once, thus eliminating the police.

The crime was committed in Saint-Cloud at about two o'clock in the morning. Heurtin was back on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince before four. He didn't go by train, or by streetcar, or in fact by any public means of conveyance. Neither did he take a taxi. And his three-wheeler remained at his employer's on Rue de Sèvres.

And he couldn't have got back on foot. Not unless he'd run the whole way without stopping.

On Boulevard Montparnasse there was the usual midday animation. It was half past twelve. In spite of the late-autumn weather, the terraces of the four big cafés near Boulevard Raspail were packed with people, eighty percent of whom were foreigners.

Maigret crossed to the Coupole, and went into the American bar.

There were only five tables there, all of them occupied.

Most of the customers were perched on the high stools at the counter or standing around.

He heard someone call out:

“A Manhattan.”

And he said:

“The same for me.”

He was not of the cocktail generation. Beer was more in his line. The barman pushed a dish of olives toward him, but he did not touch them.

“Excuse me...” said a little Swedish girl with very blond hair.

The place was writhing with humanity. A little door at the end of the room opened and shut ceaselessly, disgorging olives, chips, sandwiches, hot drinks.

Four waiters were all shouting at once, accompanied by the clatter of plates and tinkling of glasses. Snatches of different languages broke out on all sides. Yet somehow the whole scene—customers, barmen, waiters, the room itself—gave the impression of a homogeneous whole.

People jostled one another without ceremony; and everybody called the head barman Bob. Everybody: chorus girls, penniless artists, industrial magnates who drove up with their friends in luxurious cars.

People accosted each other without introduction. A German was speaking English with an American, while a Norwegian was using at least three languages to make himself understood to a Spaniard.

There were two women who seemed to be known to all. Everybody greeted them. One of them Maigret recognized. She had aged and grown stout, but there was no doubt: she was the same girl he had once had to take to Saint-Lazare after a raid on Rue de la Roquette.

Her voice was husky, her eyes tired, though she certainly looked prosperous in her furs. She shook hands casually with people as they passed. Sitting at one of the tables, she seemed

to be enthroned and tacitly accepted as the matriarch of that boisterous family around her.

“Have you got anything I can write with?” asked Maigret of one of the barmen.

“Not at this time of day. Too busy here with the cocktails, but they’ll take care of you next door.”

Among the chattering groups there were, however, one or two people who were quite by themselves, making a contrast with the others that was not the least picturesque feature of the place.

On the one hand, people shouting at the tops of their voices and ordering round after round of drinks, people whose clothes were as eccentric as they were costly. On the other, a few beings who seemed to have come from the four corners of the earth for no better purpose than to sit there embedded in that smart crowd without saying a word to anybody.

For instance, there was a girl who could hardly have been much more than twenty, dressed in a little coat and a skirt that was well cut but had certainly been ironed a hundred times. A queer face, tired and nervous. By her side was a sketchbook. And in the middle of those people drinking cocktails at ten francs a drink she was sipping a glass of milk and eating a croissant. At one o’clock—so it was obviously her midday meal. She was taking the opportunity to read a Russian paper that was one of those provided for the customers.

She heard nothing and saw nothing. Slowly she munched her croissant, taking a sip of milk from time to time, ignoring the others at her table, who were now on their fourth round.

No less striking was a man with a head of hair that was alone sufficient to attract attention. It was red, frizzy, and very long. He wore a dark suit, shiny and threadbare, with an open-necked blue shirt.

He had installed himself near the extreme end of the bar, and looked like an old habitu   whom no one would think of disturbing. Spoonful by spoonful, he was eating a pot of yogurt.

Did he have as much as five francs in his pocket? Where did he come from? What was he after? And how did he come by the few centimes he needed to pay for that yogurt, which was probably his only meal that day? Like the Russian girl, he had keen eyes under tired lids, but there was also something infinitely haughty and contemptuous in his expression.

No one shook hands with him in passing. No one spoke to him.

The revolving doors suddenly swept a couple into the bar, and Maigret, catching sight of them in a mirror, at once recognized the Kirbys.

They had driven there in an American car, which could not have been bought in Paris for less than two hundred and fifty thousand francs at the very lowest estimate. It stood there by the curb, the more noticeable for the fact that its body was completely chromium-plated.

William Kirby, pushing his way between two people, held out a hand across the mahogany bar.

“How are you, Bob?”

Mrs. Kirby went straight up to the blonde Swedish girl, kissed her and talked volubly in English.

The newcomers had no need to order drinks. Bob promptly handed Kirby a whisky-and-soda, and mixed a Pink Lady for his young wife, asking:

“Back from Biarritz already?”

“Only stayed there three days. It was raining worse than here.”

Kirby caught sight of Maigret and nodded. He was a tall, dark, supple man, about thirty. He was impeccably dressed. In fact, of all those people gathered there, he was perhaps the one in whom style was least flashy.

He shook hands with his friends casually, rather too softly, asking them:

“What’ll you have?”

He was rich. With that sports car outside, he would dash off to Nice, Biarritz, Deauville, or Berlin whenever it took his fancy.

He had been living in a grand hotel on Avenue George-V for the last few years, and from his aunt, the murdered woman, he had inherited the house at Saint-Cloud and fifteen or twenty million francs.

Mrs. Kirby was small and fragile, but extremely lively. She talked without stopping in a high-pitched voice, by which you could have picked her out anywhere. She spoke a mixture of English and French, the latter with an amazing accent.

People were standing between them and Maigret. A deputy came in and cordially shook Kirby's hand.

"Shall we lunch together?"

"Not today. We're meeting some friends."

"Tomorrow then?"

"Right. Meet us here."

"Monsieur Valanchine!" called a pageboy. "Telephone call for Monsieur Valanchine!" Someone got up hurriedly.

"Two Rubies, two!" called another.

More clatter of plates. The noise seemed to increase every minute.

"Can you change some dollars?" And then the same voice:

"You can find the rate of exchange in the paper."

"Isn't Suzy here?"

"She's just gone. Has a lunch at Maxim's."

Maigret, for his part, was thinking of the young man with the queer-shaped head and long arms, who at that very moment was somewhere or other in this teeming city with just over twenty francs in his pocket, hunted by the whole police force of France.

He thought of the pale splotch of his face against the dark wall of Santé Prison as he had slowly hauled himself up. And

then Dufour's reports over the telephone:

"Still sleeping."

He had slept the whole day long.

Where was he now? And why should he have killed that Mrs. Henderson, whom he had never known and from whom he had stolen nothing?

"Do you drop in here for a cocktail sometimes?"

It was William Kirby, who had come up to Maigret and was now holding out his cigarette case.

"No, thanks. I smoke a pipe."

"Well, have a drink? Whisky?"

"I've got one already."

Kirby looked a little put out.

"You can follow these languages? English, Russian, German?"

"Only French; that's all."

"Then this place must seem rather a babel to you. I don't think I ever noticed you here... By the way, is it true what they say?"

"What do you mean?"

"That the murderer... You know..."

"Oh, that's nothing to worry about."

For a moment Kirby looked him in the face.

"Come on. Do join us and have a drink. My wife would be so pleased. And let me introduce you to Edna Reichberg. Her father's the paper manufacturer, of Stockholm. She won the skating championship last year at Chamonix. Here, Edna, this is Inspector Maigret: Miss Reichberg."

The Russian girl in the black coat and skirt was still deep in her newspaper, and the red-haired man was staring dreamily through half-closed eyes. In front of him was the empty little

earthenware pot from which he had laboriously scraped the last dab of yogurt.

“Delighted,” said Edna, shaking Maigret’s hand heartily. Then she turned back to Mrs. Kirby and went on with her conversation in English.

“Excuse me,” said Kirby. “I’m wanted on the telephone. Two whiskies, Bob. You don’t mind, do you?”

Outside, the chromium-plated car glittered in the dull gray light, while a pathetic figure wandered around in front of it. He shuffled toward the bar, dragging his feet, and stopped for a moment at the door.

Two red-rimmed eyes stared into the bar. A waiter made for the door, ready to turn him away.

In Paris and elsewhere the police were still looking for the man who had escaped from Santé.

And there he was, almost within speaking distance of the inspector!

5

CAVIAR SANDWICHES



Maigret did not move a muscle. Beside him, Mrs. Kirby and the Swedish girl went on babbling in English over their cocktails. And so close was he to the latter, packed tight as they all were in that crowded bar, that he was conscious of every movement of her supple body.

He could not, of course, follow their conversation, but it seemed to be about a certain José, whom Edna had met at the Ritz and who had flirted with her and offered her cocaine.

The two women laughed. William Kirby returned, and said to Maigret:

“Sorry, but it was about that car of mine. I want to sell it and get another.”

He squirted soda water into the two glasses.

“Here’s luck!”

Outside, the figure of the condemned man seemed literally to float around the area of the café. He was bareheaded, having lost his cap, no doubt, in his flight from the Citanguette. His head had been cropped in prison, which exaggerated still more the size of his ears. His shoes no longer had any color or shape.

And where could he have slept to have got his suit so crumpled and covered with dust and mud?

If he had held out his hand to beg, it would have seemed quite natural, for he looked utterly derelict. But he didn’t beg, nor did he have any shoelaces or pencils to sell.

He went this way and that way, carried hither and thither by the ebb and flow of the crowd. When he was swept a little distance away, he would drag himself back like a man fighting his way upstream.

His face was dark with some days’ growth of beard. He looked thinner. But his eyes were haunting: eyes that never lost sight of the American bar, and tried from time to time to peer in through the misty windows.

Once again he came right up to the door, and it almost looked as though he was going to push it open.

Maigret smoked furiously, his temples moist with sweat, his nerves keyed up to a pitch that doubled the sharpness of his senses.

It was an extraordinary transformation. A little earlier he had looked like a beaten man. He had lost his foothold. The threads of the drama had slipped from his grasp, and he had no reason to suppose he would ever gather them up again.

He sipped his whisky. Kirby was talking with the two women, though constantly turning to Maigret to include him politely in the conversation.

It was strange: without making the smallest effort and almost unconscious of his perspicacity, Maigret missed nothing of what was going on. People were bustling and

buzzing all around him. The noises were so many and various that they fused into a vague roar like that of the sea.

Voices, movements, attitudes—nothing escaped him. He watched the man sitting over the empty pot of yogurt, and the vagabond who was so irresistibly attracted by that door. He saw Kirby's smile, his wife's pout as she put on lipstick, the vigorous movements of the barman as he shook a cocktail.

And the customers, now drifting out one by one, arranging to meet again:

“Will we see you this evening?”

“Try to bring Léa...”

Gradually the bar emptied. It was now half past one. From the next room came the scrape of knives and forks. Kirby put a hundred-franc note on the counter.

“Are you staying?” he asked Maigret.

He hadn't seen the man outside. But he was sure to run right into him as he went out. Maigret waited for it to happen in a suspense that was almost painful. Mr. Kirby and Edna nodded to him and smiled.

And there he was, Joseph Heurtin, barely two paces from the door. One of his shoelaces was gone completely. At any moment a policeman might come up to him and tell him to move on, or even ask to see his papers.

The door turned. Kirby, bareheaded, walked across to the car. The two women followed, laughing at a joke.

And nothing happened. Nothing at all. Heurtin took no more notice of the Americans than of any other passers-by. Nor did Kirby or his wife pay the least attention to him. The three got into the car and slammed the doors.

Others left, pushing aside the vagrant, who had come right up to the entrance again.

Then suddenly, in one of the mirrors, Maigret caught sight of a face. Two bright eyes under thick eyebrows, a smile, such a slight smile, but full of sarcasm.

The lids dropped at once over the too eloquent eyes. But not quickly enough, and the inspector could not help feeling that that sarcastic smile had been for him.

The man who had looked at him, and who now looked at nothing and nobody, was the red-haired customer with the yogurt pot.

When an Englishman who had been reading the *Times* went, no one except Maigret was left on the stools at the bar. Bob announced:

“I’ll get my lunch now.”

His two assistants were clearing up, collecting empty glasses and what remained of the olives and chips, and wiping the counter.

Only two people were left now at the tables, the red-haired man and the Russian girl in black. They both seemed quite unconscious of their solitude.

Joseph Heurtin was still wandering up and down outside. His eyes were so lifeless and his face so white that one of the waiters, looking through the window, said to Maigret:

“There’s another! Sure to have an epileptic fit or something. They always manage to choose the terrace of a café. I’ll send the boy...”

“No.”

The yogurt man could hear every word, but Maigret hardly lowered his voice to say:

“Call the Police Judiciaire for me. Tell them to send someone here, preferably Lucas or Janvier. Got that? Lucas or Janvier.”

“For that wretch outside?”

“Never mind.”

How quiet it was after that rumpus of a little while ago!

The red-haired man had not betrayed the slightest interest in what Maigret had said. The girl in black turned over the pages of her newspaper.

The second waiter was looking at Maigret inquisitively. And so the minutes went by, trickled by, drop by drop, second by second.

They counted up the cash. There was a rustling of notes and clink of coins. The waiter who had been to telephone came back.

“They said they’d see to it.”

“Thanks.”

Maigret’s stool creaked under his weight as he sat there smoking pipe after pipe. He emptied his glass, absent-mindedly forgetting he had had nothing to eat.

“Coffee.”

The order came from the corner: “A *café crème*.”

It was the yogurt man. The waiter shrugged his shoulders and gave Maigret a look as he shouted at the door behind the counter:

“A *crème* ...”

And aside he whispered:

“That’ll last him till seven o’clock. He’s as bad as the other one there.” And he indicated the Russian girl with a jerk of his head.

Twenty minutes went by. Heurtin, tired of walking around, was standing stock-still on the curb. A man getting into a car took him for a beggar and held out a coin, which he didn’t dare refuse.

Had he anything left of those twenty-something francs? Had he had anything to eat since the day before? Had he managed to get any sleep?

The American bar attracted him irresistibly. Once more he approached, watching for the waiters, who had already turned him away more than once.

It was the slack time of day on the terrace, and this time he reached the door unmolested. His face came right up against

the glass, his nose flattened absurdly against it, while his little eyes peered into the bar.

The red-haired man lifted his cup to his lips. He didn't turn toward the street.

But why should that same smile make his eyes sparkle once again?

One of the cafe's apprentices—a boy not yet sixteen—went up to the ragged creature outside, who shuffled off once more. Lucas got out of a taxi and came in with a puzzled look. Still more puzzled, he looked about him in the almost empty bar.

“Oh! It's you who...?”

“What'll you have?”

And in a lower voice:

“Look outside.”

It took Lucas a few moments to spot the waiting figure. Then his face lit up.

“Well! So you've managed to...”

“Nothing of the kind. Barman, some cognac.”

The Russian girl said, with a strong accent:

“Waiter, get me *Illustration*. And the professional directory too.”

“Drink up, old man, and get outside. You won't lose sight of him, will you?”

“Don't you think it might be better...?” And Lucas's hand felt in his pocket, obviously for the handcuffs.

“Not yet. Run along.”

Maigret was outwardly calm, but his nerves were so taut that he nearly crushed the glass from which he was drinking.

The red-haired man showed no inclination to go. He sat on, without reading or writing, or looking at anything in particular. And Joseph Heurtin was still prowling around outside.

At four o'clock the situation was almost the same; the only difference was that the escaped prisoner had now found a chair from the terrace and was sitting down, though without taking his eyes off the door of the bar. Maigret had forced himself to eat a sandwich.

The Russian girl, after redoing her make-up, slowly and carefully went out, leaving only Maigret and the yogurt man. Heurtin saw the girl go without betraying the faintest interest.

A man put some fresh bottles on the shelf behind the counter. Another gave the floor a hasty sweep. The lights were switched on in the bar, though the street lamps were not yet on.

The ring of a spoon against a cup, particularly coming from the corner where the red-haired man was sitting, surprised the barman no less than Maigret.

Without stopping what he was doing, without even troubling to conceal his contempt for so poor a customer, the waiter called out:

"A yogurt and a *café crème*. Three, and one fifty. Four francs fifty."

"Excuse me... Bring me some caviar sandwiches."

The voice was calm, but Maigret could see the eyes laughing under their half-closed lids.

The barman called through the little door:

"A caviar sandwich. One."

"Three," corrected the stranger.

"Three caviars. Three."

The barman looked mistrustfully at his customer, inquiring sarcastically:

"Some vodka too?"

"Yes. Some vodka too."

Maigret was making a frantic effort to understand what was going on. The man had changed. He had lost his look of

indifference.

“And some cigarettes,” he rapped out.

“Marylands?”

“No. Abdullahts.”

He smoked one while they made his sandwiches. He scribbled with a pencil on the box. Then he swallowed down the sandwiches so quickly that the waiter’s back was hardly turned before he had finished. He got up to go.

“Thirty francs, the sandwiches. The vodka, six. The Abdullahts, twenty-two. With what you had before, that makes...”

“I’ll come back and pay you tomorrow.”

Maigret was frowning. He could still see Heurtin sitting on the chair.

“Just a moment, please! You can tell that to the manager.”

The red-haired man bowed, then sat down again and waited. The manager, in a dinner jacket, arrived on the scene.

“What’s the matter?”

“This gentleman here wants to come back and pay tomorrow. Three caviar sandwiches, Abdullah cigarettes, vodka...”

The man who was causing the trouble showed no embarrassment whatever. More sarcastic than before, he merely bowed his head again, to confirm the waiter’s story.

“You have no money on you?”

“Only enough for the yogurt and the coffee.”

“Do you live in the neighborhood? I could send a man with you...”

“I have no money at home.”

“Yet you feed on caviar!”

The manager clapped his hands, and a boy in uniform ran up.

“Go and get a policeman.”

It all happened very quietly. There was no sort of row.

“You’re quite sure you have no money?”

“I think that’s what I said.”

The boy, who had waited for the answer, now dashed off. Maigret remained impassive. As for the manager, he stood there calmly staring out the window at the traffic on Boulevard Montparnasse.

The barman, while dusting his bottles, threw an understanding look at Maigret from time to time.

In less than three minutes two policemen arrived on bicycles, with the boy at their heels. They parked their bicycles and came in.

One of them recognized the inspector and started toward him, but Maigret gave him a look that said:

“Don’t drag me into this.”

And the manager, without any needless excitement, explained the situation.

“This gentleman ordered caviar, vodka, and expensive cigarettes, and now says he can’t pay.”

“I have no money,” repeated the red-haired man.

At a sign from Maigret, the policeman confined himself to saying:

“All right. You can explain things at the station. Come with us.”

“Won’t you have something while you’re here?” offered the manager.

“No, thank you.”

Streetcars and automobiles followed each other along the boulevard, and crowds of people hurried past in the misty gray twilight. The arrested man stopped to light another cigarette before going, and waved a friendly farewell to the barman.

Last, his eyes fell on Maigret and dwelled on him for two or three seconds.

“Come on. Get going. And no funny business, do you understand?”

The three went out, and the manager walked up to the bar.

“Isn’t that the Czech who had to be thrown out the other day?”

“That’s the fellow,” answered the barman. “He sits here from eight in the morning till eight at night. And we’re doing remarkably well if he orders two coffees and a yogurt in the whole twelve hours.”

Maigret had gone to the door and could see Joseph Heurtin get up from his seat and stand facing the two policemen and the man who had so suddenly taken a fancy to caviar. But it was already too dark in the street to make out his features.

Heurtin watched the receding trio for a moment or two, then turned and slouched off himself, followed by Lucas.

Maigret went back toward the bar.

“Police Judiciaire!” he said to the manager. “Who is he?”

“I think Radek’s the name. He has his letters addressed here. He’s a Czech.”

“What’s he do?”

“Nothing,” answered the barman. “Sits there just as you saw him, dreaming. Sometimes he writes.”

“Do you know where he lives?”

“No.”

“Has he got any friends?”

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen him say a word to a soul.”

Maigret paid his bill, went out, and jumped into a taxi.

“The local police station, please.”

When he got there, Radek was sitting on a bench waiting his turn. There were four or five foreigners there who had come to

register with the police.

Maigret went straight through to where the local chief inspector was dealing with a young woman who, in three or four Central European languages, was trying to tell him about the theft of some jewelry.

“Hello! Are you working in this neighborhood?” asked the inspector, surprised.

“Finish with the lady first.”

“I can’t understand a word of it. She’s been telling me the same thing over and over again for the last half hour.”

Maigret did not even smile, and the woman, getting more and more incensed, began her story for the twentieth time, pointing to her ringless fingers.

When at last she was got rid of, Maigret said:

“A man named Radek, or something like that, is being brought up before you. I’ll be here. Let him spend the night in a cell and then release him.”

“What’s he done?”

“Eaten caviar and then couldn’t pay.”

“At the Dôme?”

“No. At the Coupole.”

A bell was rung.

“Bring in Radek.”

He strolled in as cool as could be, his hands in his pockets, and stood waiting in front of the two men, meeting their stare unflinchingly, while a delighted smile played around his lips.

“You know what you’re charged with?”

Radek nodded. He wanted to light another cigarette, but it was snatched out of his hand.

“What have you got to say?”

“Nothing at all.”

“Where do you live? Have you any means of support?”

Radek produced a shabby passport, which he laid on the desk.

“You know you could get fifteen days?”

“But the sentence would be suspended,” corrected the accused quietly. “You’d have to say it was a first offense.”

“This says you’re a medical student. Is that right?”

“Professor Grollet—whose name you have no doubt heard—will tell you that I was his best pupil.”

And turning to Maigret, he said with a touch of irony in his voice:

“I suppose, monsieur, that you’re a policeman too?”

6

CAVIAR AGAIN



Madame Maigret sighed but said nothing as her husband went out at seven in the morning after gulping down a cup of coffee, apparently quite unaware that it was scalding hot.

He had been absorbed and uncommunicative when he came home long after midnight, and now, as he left, he had an obstinate look on his face.

As he stalked through the corridors of Police Headquarters, he could not help noticing the way his colleagues, his subordinates, and even the messengers looked at him—a look of curiosity mixed with a certain admiration, and perhaps a shade of pity.

But he shook hands as though nothing was the matter, just as he had kissed his wife’s forehead on leaving home. On reaching his room, he poked up the fire and spread his wet overcoat over a couple of chairs.

“The Montparnasse police station, please,” he said in a leisurely voice into the telephone.

He puffed away at his pipe and began to sort out the papers on his desk.

“Hello! Who’s that? The duty sergeant?... Inspector Maigret, Police Judiciaire, speaking. You’ve released Radek?... What’s that? An hour ago?... And you’re sure our man, Janvier, was waiting for him?... Hello! Yes... He didn’t sleep, you say?... And smoked all his cigarettes?... Thanks. No, don’t bother... If I want to know anything further, I’ll come around.”

He took the Czech’s passport from his pocket, a little grayish book bearing the arms of Czechoslovakia, nearly every page of which was covered with visas and the stamps of frontier officials.

Johann Radek, twenty-five years of age, born at Brun, father unknown. From the rubber stamps it could be seen that he had resided in Berlin, Mainz, Bonn, Turin, and Hamburg.

It stated that he was a medical student. As for his mother, Elizabeth Radek, deceased two years previously, she had been employed as a domestic servant.

“What are your means of subsistence, young man?” Maigret had asked the evening before in the Montparnasse police station.

And the red-haired man, with a disdainful smile, had answered:

“Am I to call you ‘young man’ too?”

“Answer!”

“As long as my mother was alive, she used to send me enough money for me to study medicine.”

“Out of her wages as a servant?”

“Yes. I was her only son. She’d have gone through fire for me. Does that surprise you?”

“But she died two years ago. Since then... ?”

“Some distant relatives sent me a little money from time to time... Then some Czechs here in Paris helped me occasionally... And sometimes I’ve had some translating to do.”

“And the editor of the *Sifflet*?”

“I’m afraid I don’t understand.”

He said that with such obvious sarcasm that he made it mean “You’re doing fine, my good fellow, but you haven’t got me yet!”

And Maigret had not pursued the subject, but had walked back to the Coupole, where there was now no trace of Joseph Heurtin or of Lucas. The wanderer had plunged back into Paris with the inspector on his heels.

Maigret had hailed a taxi.

“Hôtel George V.”

He entered just as William Kirby, in a dinner jacket, was standing at the desk changing some hundred-dollar bills.

“Do you want me?” he asked, seeing the inspector.

“Not unless you know a man named Radek.”

People were coming and going in the Louis XVI lobby. A hotel employee was dealing out hundred-franc notes in pinned bundles of ten.

“Radek?”

Maigret looked the American straight in the eyes, but the latter seemed quite unconcerned.

“No. But you might ask Mrs. Kirby. She’ll be down in a moment. We’re dining with some friends... There’s a charity gala at the Ritz.”

As he spoke, Mrs. Kirby came out of the elevator with a shiver, hugging her ermine cape. She looked at the policeman with some astonishment.

“What is it?”

“Nothing to worry about. I’m looking for a man named Radek.”

“Radek? Does he live here?”

Kirby pocketed his money and held out his hand to Maigret.

“You’ll excuse us, won’t you? We’re late already.”

The car that had been waiting for them glided off over the asphalt.

The telephone rang.

“Hello! Inspector Maigret? Monsieur Comélieau would like to speak to you.”

“Tell him I’m not in yet. Understand?”

At that time of the morning the examining magistrate must be calling from home. No doubt he was having his breakfast in his dressing gown, feverishly turning over the pages of his newspaper, his mouth, as usual, twitching nervously.

“Hello! Jean! Have there been any other calls for me? Did Comélieau leave any message?”

“Will you call him as soon as you get here. He’ll be at home till nine, and then in his office... Wait a moment! Here’s a call coming through now. Hello! Hello! Inspector Maigret? Yes, Monsieur Janvier, I’ll put you through.”

And a moment later Maigret heard:

“Is that you, Inspector?”

“He’s got away?”

“Yes, he has. I can’t understand it at all. I was only twenty paces away from him.”

“What happened? Quick!”

“I can’t think how it happened, because I’m certain he hadn’t seen me.”

“Go on.”

“First, he just walked around. Then he went into the Gare Montparnasse. When the suburban trains were coming in thick and fast. So I got close to him so’s not to lose him in the crowd.”

“But you lost him just the same.”

“Not in the crowd. He got into a train that had just come in, without having any ticket. I stopped a second to ask a porter

where the train went, without taking my eyes off it. And by the time I got in he'd gone. Nipped out the other side, of course."

"Naturally!"

"What shall I do now?"

"Go and wait for me in the bar of the Coupole. Don't be surprised at anything... And, above all, don't worry."

"I swear, Inspector..."

Janvier was only twenty-five, and his voice sounded like that of a boy on the point of bursting into tears.

"It's all right. At the Coupole, then..."

Maigret hung up, then lifted the receiver again.

"Hôtel George V... Hello!... Yes. Is Mr. William Kirby there?... No, don't disturb him. But what time did he get back last night?... At three? With Mrs. Kirby? Thank you... What did you say?... He gave orders not to call him before eleven? Thanks... No, no message. I'll be seeing him myself."

The inspector filled his pipe and made sure the stove was stoked up to the top.

At that moment, to anyone who did not know him, he would have given the impression of being a man sure of himself, making straight for an inevitable goal. He threw his head back and blew a cloud of smoke up to the ceiling. He joked with the messenger who brought in the morning papers.

But as soon as he was alone again he went back to the telephone.

"Hello! Nothing from Lucas yet?"

"Nothing so far, Inspector."

Maigret bit hard on the mouthpiece of his pipe. It was now nine o'clock. Ever since five o'clock the previous afternoon! That was when Joseph Heurtin had disappeared around the corner of Boulevard Raspail with Lucas following.

Was it conceivable that the latter had not had a chance, in all those sixteen hours, either to telephone or to slip a note into

some policeman's hand?

Maigret was visibly anxious. He called Dufour, who came to the telephone himself.

"Are you better?"

"Yes, I'm already on my feet again. Tomorrow I hope to be able to come to the Quai des Orfèvres for a while... But it's going to leave a hell of a scar. The doctor took the dressing off yesterday, and I had a look at it. It's a marvel my head wasn't broken in two ...Anyhow, you've got your man, I hope."

"Don't worry about that. Look, I've got to go now. Someone's trying to get through to me, and I'm waiting for a call."

It was stifling in the room, with the stove roaring away and the metal getting red hot in places. Maigret was not disappointed: it was Lucas calling.

"Hello! Is that you, Chief?... Hello! Don't cut me off, mademoiselle. Police! Hello!"

"I can hear you. Where are you?"

"At Morsang."

"Where's that?"

"A little village on the Seine, thirty-five kilometers from Paris."

"And your friend?"

"He's safe. At his parents'."

"So you're close to Nandy?"

"Four kilometers away. I came here to telephone, so's not to give the show away. What a night we've had!"

"Tell me all about it."

"First we wandered around the streets. All over the place. He didn't seem to care where he went. At eight o'clock we stopped at a public soup kitchen on Rue Reaumur, where he waited nearly two hours for his ration."

"So he had no more money."

“Then he set off again. It’s incredible how the Seine attracts him. We followed it, sometimes upstream, sometimes down... Hello! Don’t cut me off. Are you there?”

“Yes, go on.”

“Finally we got near Charenton, still keeping to the river. I expected him to look for a place to sleep under one of the bridges... You ought to have seen him! He could hardly stand... But no. We went right through Charenton and on to Alfortville, where he made for the road leading to Villeneuve-Saint-Georges. It was pitch-black and soaking wet. Cars splashed by every thirty seconds. If I had to begin that over again!”

“You will, my boy. But go on.”

“That’s all. Only there was thirty-five kilometers of it. You can’t imagine what it was like. It was raining just about as hard as it could... Anyhow, he didn’t notice anything. At Corbeil I nearly took a taxi to follow him with... At six this morning we were still going, one behind the other, crossing through the woods between Morsang and Nandy.”

“Did he go in through the door when he got home?”

“Do you know the place? Quite a humble roadside inn. They also sell newspapers and tobacco, and various oddments... No, he didn’t go right in. He skirted around to the back by a narrow path and then jumped over a wall. I saw him go into an outbuilding, the sort of place where you might keep a couple of goats.”

“Nothing else?”

“Nothing much. Half an hour later his father came out and opened the shutters. He appeared quite natural. I went in and had a drink. Certainly he didn’t seem to be in the least upset. I managed to catch a policeman cycling along the road. I got him to puncture a tire and make that a pretext for stopping at the inn until I got back.”

“Good!”

“You think so? But then, you’re not splashed with mud from head to foot. My socks are like sponges, and it’s gone right

through to my shirt... What shall I do?"

"You might change, if you've got your luggage with you."

"If I'd had to carry a trunk too!"

"Well, get back to Nandy. Say anything you like: that you're waiting for a friend who's asked you to meet him there."

"Are you coming?"

"I can't tell. But, you know, if Heurtin gets away again, it'll just about finish me off."

Maigret hung up and looked vacantly around him. Then, through a half-open door, he called to his clerk:

"Look! As soon as I've gone, call Monsieur Comélieau and tell him... let me see... tell him all's going well and that I'll keep him posted. You understand? Nicely... with lots of polite phrases."

At eleven he got out of a taxi at the Coupole. The first person he saw as he pushed his way through the door of the bar was Janvier, who, like all beginners, thought he was playing his part well by concealing three-quarters of his person behind a newspaper, whose pages he never turned.

In the opposite corner, Johann Radek was carelessly stirring his *café crème*.

He was freshly shaved, had on a clean shirt, and it even looked as though he had run a comb through his frizzy hair.

But the dominant impression he gave was one of intense interior jubilation.

The barman recognized Maigret and gave him a significant look, while Janvier, behind his paper, went through almost a pantomime of meaningful glances.

This subtle comedy was rendered superfluous, however, by Radek, who immediately addressed himself to Maigret:

"May I offer you something?"

He had half risen from his seat. He barely smiled, but there was not a feature of his face that did not betray a keen

intelligence.

Maigret went forward, broad and heavy, seized a chair with a hand that could have crushed it, and lowered himself to it.

“So you’re back again?” he said, looking elsewhere.

“Yes. Those gentlemen were most considerate. It seems that my case can’t come up in less than a fortnight, so meanwhile they’ve let me go... But it’s rather late for coffee. How would you like some vodka and caviar sandwiches?... Barman!”

The barman blushed to the ears. He was visibly reluctant to serve this preposterous customer.

“I trust you won’t ask me to pay in advance, considering that I’m in company,” Radek went on.

And, turning to Maigret, he explained:

“These people don’t understand a thing. Would you believe it? When I came in just now they didn’t want to serve me! He went right off to get the manager without saying a word. And the manager asked me to go... I had to toss some money on the table... Funny, isn’t it?”

He said it all gravely, almost dreamily.

“Now, if I were a flashy young loafer like some of those gigolos you saw here yesterday, they’d give me as much credit as I wanted. But because I’m a man of character... Yes, it’s funny, isn’t it?... You know, Inspector, we must talk it over one of these days, the two of us. Perhaps you won’t understand everything... All the same, I think you pride yourself on being an intelligent person...”

The waiter put the caviar sandwiches down on the table, not without a furtive glance at Maigret.

“Sixty francs.”

Radek smiled. In the other corner, Janvier was still in ambush behind his paper.

“A pack of Abdullahs,” ordered the red-haired Czech.

And while they were being brought, he felt in one of the side pockets of his jacket and ostentatiously produced a

crumpled thousand-franc note, which he threw on the table.

“What were we saying, Inspector?... But you’ll excuse me. I’ve suddenly remembered I must call my tailor.”

The telephones were in the large room next door, which had several exits. Maigret did not budge. But Janvier got up automatically and followed at a discreet distance.

They came back a few minutes later, one behind the other, and Janvier gave an affirmative nod to his chief. Radek really had telephoned to a tailor.

A FAMILY IN TROUBLE



Let me give you some good advice, Inspector.”

Radek had lowered his voice to a confidential tone and was leaning over toward Maigret.

“Of course I know perfectly well what you’ll be thinking. But, you see, it doesn’t matter to me what you think, not the slightest... All the same, I’d like to give you some advice. Let it alone. Don’t waste your time beating rotten eggs.”

Maigret sat there stolidly, looking straight in front of him.

“You go on poking around, yet you haven’t got the faintest idea...”

The Czech was warming up, though in a quiet, almost dull way that was characteristic of the man. Out of the corner of his eye, Maigret noticed his hands, long hands, astonishingly white and slightly freckled. They seemed to warm up to the subject too, and to take part in the conversation.

“Don’t think for a moment that I’m throwing doubt on your professional capacity. If in this case you understand nothing—no; less than nothing—it’s because right from the start you’ve been working on falsified data. And once on the wrong track, everything was inevitably wrong. Isn’t that so? And all that you find out will be wrong, to the very end...”

“On the other hand, the few things that might have helped you escaped your notice...”

“For instance, you must admit that you failed to notice the part played all along by the Seine. The house at Saint-Cloud is on the banks of the Seine. Rue Monsieur-le-Prince is five minutes’ walk from the Seine. The Citanguette, where the papers say he hid after his escape—on the Seine too. Heurtin was born at Melun, on the banks of the Seine. His parents live at Nandy, on the banks of the Seine!”

The Czech's eyes were laughing, though the rest of his face was serious.

"You're quite at a loss to know what I'm up to, aren't you? It looks as though I'm anxious to put my head in a noose. You don't ask me a single question, and here I am, plunging into the very subject in which you're dying to get me involved... But how can I be brought into it? I have nothing to do with Heurtin. I have nothing to do with Kirby. Nothing to do with Mrs. Henderson, or with her maid... All you could bring up against me is that yesterday this Joseph Heurtin was wandering around outside, and that he seemed to be looking for me...

"Maybe he was. Maybe he wasn't... Anyhow, the fact remains that I left the place escorted by a couple of policemen...

"But does that prove anything... ?

"I tell you again you don't understand the first thing about it. And what's more, you never will...

"What am I doing in this business? Nothing at all. Or possibly everything!

"Just imagine an intelligent man—more than intelligent—who has nothing to do, who spends his days sitting and thinking, and imagine that he has the opportunity to study a problem that touches on his own subject—for, after all, medicine and criminology overlap..."

Maigret's stubborn stillness was exasperating. He didn't even seem to be listening. The young man's voice rose a tone higher as he went on:

"Well, what do you say, Inspector? Are you ready to admit that you're groping in the dark? No? Not yet? Well, allow me to tell you that you're making a big mistake, having got a conviction, to let your man go. You may never find anybody else to take his place. And there's always the possibility that he'll get away completely...

"We were talking just now about false data. Shall I give you further proof? And shall I give you at the same time the

pretext you need in order to arrest me?”

He swallowed down his vodka at a gulp and leaned back in his seat, thrusting a hand into one of his jacket pockets.

When he brought it out, it was full of hundred-franc notes pinned together in bundles of ten. There were ten packs.

“You see? Brand-new notes. In other words, notes that can easily be traced. Trace them! Have a good time! Unless, of course, you’d rather go home to bed, which is what I would really advise...”

He got up. Maigret remained sitting, looking him over from head to foot and blowing a thick cloud of smoke from his pipe.

Customers were beginning to arrive.

“Would you like to arrest me?”

Maigret was in no hurry to answer. He picked up the notes and contemplated them before putting them in his pocket.

At last he too got up, though so slowly that Radek could not help wincing. Gently he put two fingers on the young man’s shoulder.

It was the old Maigret once more. Powerful, placid, sure of himself.

“Listen, son.”

It was in such complete contrast to the pitch of Radek’s voice, his nervous manner, his keen eyes, which sparkled with another sort of intelligence altogether.

Maigret was by twenty years the elder, and the difference could be felt.

“Listen, son.”

Janvier, as he overheard the words, could hardly keep from laughing, so delighted was he to see his chief once more at the top of his form.

The latter merely added, with the same casual good humor:

“We’ll meet again one of these days, don’t you worry.”

Whereupon he nodded to the barman, stuffed his hands in his coat pockets, and went to the door.

“As far as I can tell, they’re the ones,” said the man in the Hôtel George V, examining the bundles of money that Maigret had handed him. “But there was much more than that. There was ten thousand in hundred-franc notes, the rest in thousands. A hundred thousand francs altogether.

A few moments later he got through to the bank.

“Hello! Have you got the numbers of the notes I sent for yesterday? Not the thousands—only the hundreds.”

He jotted down the numbers with a pencil, hung up, and turned to the inspector.

“Yes, they’re the ones. I hope there’s not going to be any trouble.”

“Not the slightest... Are Mr. and Mrs. Kirby in?”

“They went out half an hour ago.”

“You saw them yourself?”

“As clearly as I see you.”

“Are there many exits?”

“Two. But the other’s used only by the staff.”

“You told me Mr. and Mrs. Kirby got back at three o’clock this morning. Since then, has anybody been to see them?”

Maids, porters, and elevator boys were asked in turn. And there seemed no doubt whatever that between three o’clock and eleven the Kirbys had not left their rooms, nor had they received any visitors.

“Have they sent anybody out with a letter?”

No. That too seemed out of the question.

From the previous afternoon up till seven that morning Radek had been in custody. He could not have communicated with anyone during that time. At seven he had been released with hardly any money in his pockets. Toward eight he had given Janvier the slip at the Gare Montparnasse.

And then at ten o'clock he was back at the Coupole with at least eleven thousand francs in his possession, of which ten thousand at any rate had incontestably been in William Kirby's pocket the evening before.

"Do you mind if I go upstairs and have a look around?"

His request was referred to the manager. He didn't like the idea, but couldn't very well say no. The elevator took Maigret up to the third floor.

It was a typical suite of a palatial hotel. Two bedrooms, two bathrooms, two sitting rooms. The beds were still unmade, the breakfast trays still there. In one bedroom a valet was brushing Kirby's dress clothes; in the other Mrs. Kirby's evening dress was thrown over the back of a chair. Various objects were lying around: cigarette cases, a lady's handbag, a walking stick, an uncut novel.

Back in the street, Maigret took a taxi to the Ritz, where he was assured that the Kirbys, with Edna Reichberg, had sat at table Number 18 the night before. They had arrived about nine and had not left till after half past two. No, the maître d'hôtel had noticed nothing unusual.

"But those notes!..." groaned Maigret as he crossed Place Vendôme.

He stopped suddenly, and was nearly caught by a limousine.

"Why the devil should Radek have shown them to me? Worse still, they're in my pocket now, and I'd be hard pressed to find a legal reason for their being there... And then that story of the Seine..."

On a sudden impulse he stopped a taxi. "How long will it take you to drive to Nandy? It's a little farther than Corbeil."

"An hour, with the roads so slippery."

"Fine. And stop at the first tobacconist's."

And Maigret spent an hour after his own heart, snugly ensconced in a corner of the cab, whose windows were splashed with rain and misty from the warmth inside. He smoked incessantly, warmly wrapped in the enormous

overcoat that had become a byword on Quai des Orfèvres. The suburbs of Paris glided by, then the October countryside. Sometimes a drab band of river came into view between the gables of houses and the bare trees.

Radek could have only one motive in talking to me like that and showing me those notes, thought Maigret. He wants to sidetrack me by dragging a red herring across the trail...

But why? To give Heurtin time to escape? To compromise Kirby?...

But at the same time he's compromising himself.

The Czech's words came back to him:

"Right from the start you've been working on falsified data."

My God! Wasn't that exactly what Maigret thought? Wasn't that why he had reopened the case, although a verdict had been pronounced?

But to what extent had the facts been falsified? And how? After all, the material evidence against Heurtin was formidable. It couldn't all have been faked.

Admittedly Heurtin's shoes could have been borrowed by the murderer, but not his fingerprints, which had been found all over the place, even on the sheets and the curtains. How could they have been faked?

Then Heurtin had unquestionably been seen at midnight at the Pavilion Bleu. And he had got back to Rue Monsieur-le-Prince at four.

"You don't understand the first thing about it. And what's more, you never will." That's what Radek had said, this Czech who had suddenly sailed into the middle of the picture, though a moment before his very existence had been unknown.

The previous day at the Coupole, William Kirby had not so much as glanced at Radek. And when Maigret had pronounced the name at the hotel, he had not seen the faintest glint of recognition come into the American's eyes.

Yet that didn't alter the fact that several bundles of hundred-franc notes had passed out of his pocket into the other's.

And to crown it all, it was Radek himself who seemed anxious that the police should know. More than that even—was he not positively clamoring for the principal part in the play?

“Between the time Janvier lost him at the Gare Montparnasse and the time I found him at the Coupole he had changed his shirt and had a shave. And it was during that time that he came into possession of the money...

“Anyhow, he could hardly have had time to get to Nandy and back,” said Maigret to himself, trying to derive some consolation from that conclusion.

The village was on a plateau that looks down on the valley of the Seine. The west wind swept across it in gusts, bending the trees. Plowed fields stretched as far as the eye could see. In the distance, a man with a gun looked tiny in that great expanse.

“Where shall I take you?” asked the driver, opening the window behind him.

“To the entrance of the village... And wait for me.”

There was just one long street; halfway down was the inn. Its sign bore the name Evariste Heurtin.

A bell rang as Maigret pushed open the door and entered a room hung with oleographs. There was no one there, though Lucas's hat was hanging on a nail.

“Hello! Anyone here?” called Maigret.

He heard steps over his head, but it was a good five minutes before anyone came down. It was a man in his sixties, fairly tall. There was an unnatural fixity in his blank stare.

“What can I get you?” he asked, without coming through the doorway. Then almost at once he added:

“Are you from the police too?”

His voice was absolutely flat, his words hardly articulated. He said no more, but merely pointed to the staircase at the foot of which he was standing. Then slowly he went upstairs again.

The stairs were narrow, the walls whitewashed. From above came confused sounds. When one of the bedroom doors was opened, the first thing Maigret saw was Lucas, standing by the window. He was looking down and didn't see the inspector for a moment.

Then he saw a bed, with a figure bending over it. And an old woman hunched up in an old-fashioned armchair.

The room was large, the beams showing in the ceiling, the wallpaper peeling off here and there. The floorboards creaked at every step.

"Shut that door," said the man bending over the bed, peremptorily.

It was a doctor. His bag was lying open on the round mahogany table. At last Lucas, looking thoroughly disconcerted, went up to Maigret.

"Here already?" he asked. "I hardly expected you so soon."

It was Joseph Heurtin lying on the bed, his chest bare, skin livid, ribs sticking out. He looked like some broken object.

The old woman was whining and groaning. The father went and stood by the head of the bed. His stare was actually frightening, it was so utterly expressionless.

"Come outside," said Lucas, "and I'll tell you what's happened."

They went out. On the landing Lucas hesitated, then opened the door of another bedroom, and the two went in. The room had not yet been cleaned up, and a woman's clothes were lying about. The window looked out on the yard behind the house, where the hens were paddling around in the soaking manure.

"Well?"

"A rotten morning, I assure you. As soon as I'd telephoned, I came back here, and made a sign to the policeman that he

was no longer wanted. I sat in the room downstairs trying to guess what was going on in the house.

“The old man was in the room with me. He asked if I wanted anything to eat. I thought he looked at me a little suspiciously, particularly when I said I might be staying the night because I was waiting for someone to meet me here.

“Some whispering began in the kitchen, and I saw the man was trying to listen. He looked somewhat surprised, and called out: ‘Is that you, Victorine?’

“There was no further sound for two or three minutes. Then his wife appeared, looking very queer, like someone who’s thoroughly upset but wants to look natural.

“ ‘I’m going for the milk,’ she said.

“ ‘But it’s not time yet,’ he answered.

“She went out just the same, as she was, in her sabots and with a shawl over her head. As soon as she’d gone, old Heurtin went into the kitchen, where his daughter was.

“I could hear them talking and then the girl sobbing, but I caught the words of only one remark: ‘I might have known it from the way your mother looked.’

“He strode out into the yard, and I heard him open a door—no doubt the door of the outbuilding where Joseph was hiding. It was an hour before he reappeared. Meanwhile, the girl was serving drinks to some drivers. Her eyes were red, and she couldn’t look anybody in the face.

“The mother came back, and there was more whispering behind the scenes. When old Heurtin reappeared, he looked just the way you saw him.

“It was only afterward that I understood all these comings and goings... The women had discovered Joseph in the outbuilding and had decided to tell the old man nothing about it. He, however, realized that there was something up. When his wife went out, he pumped the girl, who couldn’t keep the secret. As soon as he knew, he went out and told Joseph to clear off.

“You sized him up, I suppose... A very decent sort, and no doubt pretty strict in his ideas of right and wrong... At the same time, he guessed who I was...

“I don’t think he’d have handed his boy over to me. In fact, he was probably ready to help him get away. But he wouldn’t let him stay.

“Anyhow, about ten o’clock I was standing at the window looking out to the yard, and I saw Madame Heurtin sneaking along in her stockings, in spite of the rain, making for the outbuilding.

“A few seconds later she was screaming for help... It was a nasty sight, I can tell you... I got there at the same moment as the old man, and I swear I saw the sweat fairly spurt out on his temples.

“The fellow was in such a queer position against the wall. You had to get quite close to see that he’d hanged himself on a nail.

“Old Heurtin had more presence of mind than I did. It was he who cut him down. He stretched the boy out on the straw and got his tongue forward, at the same time shouting to his daughter to go for the doctor.

“The whole household was, of course, in a terrible state. Well, you’ve seen for yourself how things are. It’s quite upset me too.

“But aside from the family and the doctor, no one knows anything. In the village they think it’s Madame Heurtin who’s ill... His father and I carried him upstairs together. The doctor’s been working on him for the best part of an hour. It seems there’s a good chance of bringing him around... The old man hasn’t spoken a word the whole time. On the other hand, the girl got hysterical, and they shut her up in the kitchen so that she wouldn’t be heard from the street.”

A door opened, and Maigret, going out to the landing, caught the doctor about to leave. They went down together, and Maigret drew him aside.

“Police Judiciaire, doctor. How is he?”

He was a country doctor, who was at no pains to hide his lack of sympathy for the police.

“Are you going to take him away?” he asked, somewhat disagreeably.

“I don’t know. It depends on how he is.”

“They found him just in time. But it will take him some days to recover. I suppose it’s at Santé that he got in this pitiable condition. One might think there was not a drop of blood in his veins.”

“I must ask you not to speak of this to anyone...”

“The request is unnecessary. We have a code in our profession.”

Joseph’s father had followed them down. His eyes were fixed on Maigret, but he didn’t ask any questions. Mechanically, he took the two empty glasses that were standing on the bar and rinsed them in the sink.

A minute went by. A bad minute, hardly bearable. The three men could hear the sound of sobbing coming from the kitchen. Maigret sighed.

“Would you like to keep him here a few days?” he asked, looking at the old man.

No answer.

“I would have to leave one of my men in the house ...”

The innkeeper’s eyes were turned for a moment on Lucas, who had now joined them. Then he looked down again at the glasses he was drying. A tear ran down his cheek.

“He swore to his mother...” he began. But he turned his head away, unable to go on. To recover his composure he poured himself a glass of rum, though it seemed to cost him an effort to swallow it.

Maigret, turning to Lucas, merely grunted:

“Stay here.”

He did not leave the place at once, but went along the passageway and out into the yard. Through the kitchen window he could see the girl leaning against the wall, her head buried in her arms.

On the other side of the manure heap, the door of the outbuilding was wide open. A piece of cord still hung from a stout iron nail.

The inspector retraced his steps, finding only Lucas in the café.

“Where’s he gone?”

“Upstairs.”

“He said nothing, I suppose? I’ll send somebody to take turns with you. Call me twice a day.”

“It’s you who did it, I tell you. It’s you who killed him,” cried the old woman upstairs through her tears. “Go away. You’ve killed him... My boy... My own little boy!...”

A bell rang. It was Maigret opening the door. He walked off to find his taxi on the outskirts of the village.

8

A MAN IN THE HOUSE



Maigret got out of a taxi in front of the Hendersons’ house at Saint-Cloud. It was just past three. After getting back from Nandy, he had remembered that he had never returned the key given him in July when he was making his investigations.

He went there without any precise motive. There was just a chance that he might stumble on some clue that he had so far overlooked. Or perhaps the mere atmosphere of the place might give him an idea.

The house was a substantial though ugly building, flanked by a turret and surrounded by a good-sized rambling garden. The shutters were closed. The garden paths were littered with dead leaves.

Maigret opened the gate and approached the house. He could not help being oppressed by the desolate look of it all. It was more like a cemetery than a place for living people.

Almost reluctantly, he went up the four steps, on either side of which were pretentious plaster figures. A lantern of wrought iron hung over the door. Inside, it took him a moment or two to get used to the semidarkness of the hall.

There was something sordid about this mixture of luxury and decay. The ground floor had not been used for four years, that is to say, ever since Mr. Henderson's death. Yet most of the furniture, and even the ornaments, had been left just as they were.

When Maigret went into the drawing room, the cut-glass chandelier tinkled in the draft. The parquet floor creaked under his tread.

He switched on the light to see if it was working. A dozen lamps, out of twenty, instantly went on, but so thick was the dust on them that they glowed only dimly.

Valuable rugs had been rolled up and stacked in one corner. The armchairs had all been pushed against the wall. A few trunks were standing around. One was empty; another, smelling strongly of mothballs, contained some of the dead man's clothes. And it was four years since he'd died!

The place had glittered in his day. In that very room, grand receptions had been given, and the names of the guests had been reported in the papers. On the huge mantelpiece was a half-consumed box of cigars.

The story of its former occupants was written in that room. The past lay there heavy and oppressive.

A couple who had no doubt been happy, who had at any rate led a brilliant social life, with friends in most of the capitals of Europe. Then Mrs. Henderson was widowed at seventy, and too tired to carry on that life alone. Too tired even to move to a smaller house, she had simply shut herself up in her own suite of rooms upstairs, leaving the rest of the house to take care of itself.

Nothing was left of all the brilliance but a sequestered old lady with her maid-companion...

And then one night she was...

Maigret wandered on through two other reception rooms and then through a handsomely furnished dining room. Leaving that, he found himself back in the hall, at the foot of the stairs, which were marble up to the next floor.

The slightest noise resounded in the empty house.

The Kirbys had not touched anything. It was doubtful whether they had even set foot in the place since the aunt's death. A house utterly abandoned. So much so that Maigret found on one of the stairs a candle he had used during his investigations in July.

On the first landing he stopped suddenly, gripped by an uneasy feeling, which he could not analyze for a moment. When he did, he held his breath and listened.

Hadn't he heard something? No, he couldn't be sure. But somehow or other he had, most definitely, the impression that he was not alone. Obscurely he sensed a flicker of life in that empty house.

He shrugged his shoulders, however, and went on. But on opening the door in front of him he frowned and sniffed.

Yes, that was the smell of tobacco smoke. And not stale either. Somebody had been smoking there very recently.

He walked on rapidly and found himself in the dead woman's boudoir. The door to the bedroom was ajar. Pushing it open, Maigret saw nobody, but the smell was more unmistakable than ever. And there on the floor was some fine cigarette ash, clearly visible even in that dim light.

"Who's there?"

He would have liked to be calmer, but he could not help having an uneasy feeling.

After all, wasn't the whole setting enough to be disturbing? In the bedroom, signs of the carnage were hardly obliterated. One of Mrs. Henderson's dresses was still there, just as it had

been flung over the back of a chair. The light came in strips between the slats of the shutters. And in that dim interior someone was moving.

For this time it was definitely audible: a metallic noise coming from the bathroom.

Maigret strode forward, but when he got there it was empty. He could now hear steps quite clearly on the other side of a door leading to a hall.

Automatically feeling for his revolver, he rushed through the door too, and saw the back stairs on the other side of the hall. It was light here, because the staircase windows had no shutters.

Someone was going upstairs, and obviously trying to do so as quietly as possible. Maigret called out once more: "Who's there?"

He was now thoroughly excited. Now, when he really least expected it, the truth was perhaps falling into his hands.

He started running. A door slammed on the floor above. The fugitive hurried across a room, and another door opened and shut.

Maigret was gaining ground. As on the bottom floor, the rooms here, spare bedrooms, had been abandoned. Furniture and objects of all sorts were scattered about.

A vase crashed to the floor. The inspector was afraid of one thing: that he would come to a door that the other had had the presence of mind to lock behind him. "In the name of the law... !" he shouted. But the fugitive did not stop. They'd gone halfway around the floor when his hand reached a doorknob at the same time as someone on the other side felt for the key. "Open, or..." The key turned. Almost without thinking what he was doing, the inspector took three steps backward and hurled himself with all his weight against the large upper panel of the door.

The framework of the door was stout enough, but the panel was thin, and it creaked hopefully. In the other room a window was opened.

“In the name of the law... !” shouted Maigret again, oblivious of the fact that his presence in that house, which now belonged to William Kirby, was anything but legal, since he had no search warrant.

Twice, three times, his shoulder rammed against the panel, which was now beginning to crack. He was just mustering his strength for a fourth dive at it when a shot rang out, followed by a silence so complete that Maigret remained standing in suspense, his lips parted.

“Who is it? Open this door!”

Not a sound. Not even a groan. Or that characteristic clatter of a revolver falling.

With a burst of fury Maigret flung himself once more against the panel, which now gave way. Quickly he put his hand through the opening and unlocked the door.

A gust of cold damp air blew in an open window, through which could be seen the lighted windows of a restaurant opposite and the yellow mass of a streetcar.

On the floor a man was sitting with his back to the wall, his body leaning slightly over to the left. The gray suit alone told Maigret it was William Kirby. It would have been difficult for anybody to identify the face, or what little was left of it.

The American must have put his revolver to the roof of his mouth, because half the head was blown away.

Once more Maigret wandered through the rooms. He walked slowly and gloomily, trying the switches at each door as he went through. Some of the lamps had no bulbs, but most had, so that before long the house was pretty well lighted from top to bottom.

In Mrs. Henderson's bedroom he caught sight of a telephone by the bed. He lifted the receiver, in case it had not been disconnected. An answering click told him it was still working.

Never had he had so strongly the feeling of being in a house of death. There he was, sitting on the edge of the very bed in

which the old lady had been stabbed, looking through the doorway near which Elise Chatrier's body had been found.

And there on the floor above was now a fresh corpse, sitting under an open window that let in the damp, chill October air.

"Hello ! The Police Judiciaire, please." In spite of himself, his voice was subdued.

"Hello! Give me the commissioner. Maigret speaking... Is that you, Chief?... William Kirby has just shot himself in the Hendersons' house in Saint-Cloud... Yes... I'm on the spot. Will you give orders for... Yes, I was here at the time. Only three or four yards away, but there was a door between us... Yes, I know... No, I can't explain anything. Later perhaps..."

After hanging up, he sat there for several minutes without moving, staring straight in front of him. Then he absent-mindedly filled his pipe, but forgot to light it.

The house seemed to him like a huge, cold, empty box, in which he was an infinitely small particle.

"Falsified data..." he muttered softly.

He thought of going upstairs again. But what was the use? The American was dead, all right... His right hand still gripped the revolver with which he had shot himself.

Maigret snorted. He was thinking of Comélieau. He'd have heard about it by now. Most likely he'd be the one to come with the police experts from Criminal Records.

On the wall hung a life-size oil portrait of Mr. Henderson, looking very solemn in evening dress, with the ribbon of the Legion of Honor and other decorations.

The inspector started wandering again. He went into Elise Chatrier's room and opened a closet. Several dresses, some of silk, some of wool, were neatly hanging in a row.

His ear caught every sound outside, and he gave a sigh of relief when at last he heard two cars stop almost at the same moment outside the gate. There were voices in the garden. Monsieur Comélieau was saying in his most peevish tone:

"Really! It's inconceivable... Quite inconceivable..."

Maigret went downstairs like a host going down to receive his guests. When he opened the door, however, he merely said:

“This way.”

He never forgot how the examining magistrate looked at him. Such a look! And the little man’s lips really trembled with indignation before blurting out:

“I’m waiting for your explanation, Inspector.”

But Maigret simply led the way up to the room on the third floor, where he finally said:

“There you are.”

“Did you ask him to meet you here?”

“No. I had no idea he was in the house... I came merely on the off chance of finding out something that might be useful.”

“Where was he?”

“I suppose in his aunt’s room. But he ran off when I came up... I followed... He got this far, and then, as I was trying to break down the door, he shot himself.”

By the look on Monsieur Comélieau’s face you might have thought he doubted Maigret’s story. But it really expressed only his abiding horror of complications of any kind.

The doctor examined the body. Cameras were brought upstairs and photographs taken.

“Heurtin?” snapped Monsieur Comélieau.

“... will take his place in Santé whenever you like.”

“So you’ve found him?”

Maigret shrugged his shoulders.

“Then the sooner he’s locked up, the better.”

“Just as you like, Magistrate.”

“Is that all you have to say to me?”

“All for the moment.”

“You still think that... ?”

“That Heurtin’s innocent? I really have nothing to tell you. I asked for ten days, and I haven’t yet had two.”

“Where are you going to now?”

“I don’t know.”

Maigret stuck his hands in his overcoat pockets and stood for a while watching the experts on the job. Then he turned and went downstairs again to Mrs. Henderson’s room and picked up the telephone receiver.

“Hello! Hôtel George V ...Hello! Will you tell me if Mrs. Kirby is there?... What’s that?... Having tea? Thank you... No, no message.”

Monsieur Comélieau had followed him down and was standing by the door looking at him sourly.

“You see what a mess you’ve made.”

Without answering, Maigret put on his hat, saluted the magistrate curtly, and went out. He had not kept his taxi, and had to walk to the Saint-Cloud bridge before finding one.

Muted music. Couples dancing languidly. Pretty women, mostly foreigners, grouped around the table of the elegant *salon de thé* of the Hôtel George V.

Maigret, who had with ill grace relinquished his overcoat to the cloakroom attendant, made for a group in which he had recognized Edna Reichberg and Mrs. Kirby.

They were listening to a young Scandinavian, who appeared to be telling some amusing story, since they were laughing continuously.

“Madame Kirby...” said the inspector with a bow.

She looked up at him with curiosity, then looked at the other two, like someone who does not care to be disturbed.

“Yes, what is it?”

“Could you give me a few minutes?”

“Now? Is it so urgent?”

But he seemed so serious that she got up without more ado and looked around for a quiet corner.

“Come to the bar,” she said. “No one goes there at this time of day.”

The bar was empty. They remained standing.

“Did you know your husband was going to Saint-Cloud this afternoon?”

“I don’t understand. He’s free to go wherever...”

“I’m asking you whether he spoke of going to the Hendersons’ house.”

“No.”

“Have you been there together since the...?”

She shook her head.

“Never. It’s too sad.”

“Your husband went there today, alone.”

She began to be anxious, looking inquiringly into Maigret’s eyes.

“Well?”

“He’s had an accident.”

“With his car? I always knew...”

Edna looked into the bar inquisitively, on the pretext of searching for a handbag she had left somewhere.

“No, madame... Your husband tried to take his own life.”

The young woman’s eyes filled with astonishment, then with doubt. For an instant she seemed on the point of bursting into laughter.

“William?”

“He fired a revolver bullet into...”

Two feverish hands suddenly seized Maigret’s wrists, while his ears were assailed by a flood of questions in English. Then suddenly she shuddered, let go of him, and drew back a step.

“It is my duty, madame, to tell you that your husband died two hours ago in the house at Saint-Cloud.”

But Mrs. Kirby was no longer listening. She marched with long strides across the *salon de thé*, without a glance at Edna or the Scandinavian, went into the lobby, and, bareheaded and empty-handed as she was, rushed out into the street.

The doorman asked her:

“A taxi?”

But she was already getting into one, calling out:

“To Saint-Cloud... As quick as you can.”

Maigret saw no point in following her. He collected his precious overcoat, and when a bus passed, going toward the Cité, he jumped to the rear platform.

“Any calls for me?” he asked when he got to his room.

“One at two o’clock. There’s a note on your desk.”

The note was a message from Janvier:

“Tried on a suit at the tailor’s. Lunch in a restaurant on Boulevard Montparnasse. Two o’clock, coffee at Coupole. Has telephoned twice.”

And since two? Maigret wondered, as he sank into his chair, having previously locked his door. When he suddenly woke up, he was astonished to find it was half past ten.

“Has anyone telephoned?”

“Were you here? I thought you’d gone out. Monsieur Comélieau called up twice.”

“And Janvier?”

“No.”

Half an hour later Maigret walked into the bar of the Coupole, where there was no sign of either Radek or Janvier. He drew the barman aside.

“Has the Czech been in again?”

“He spent the afternoon here, with your friend... You know, the young man in the raincoat.”

“At the same table?”

“In this very corner. And they drank at least four whiskies each.”

“When did they go?”

“First they had dinner in the next room.”

“Together?”

“Together... They left only a little while ago.”

“You don’t know where they went?”

“You might ask the boy outside. He got them a taxi.”

The boy remembered.

“It was the blue one that’s always standing opposite. They can’t have gone very far, because there it is, back again already.”

A moment later the driver was saying:

“Yes, that’s right. I took them to the Pélican on Rue des Ecoles.”

“Well, take me there too, will you?”

Maigret stalked into the Pélican, looking anything but agreeable. He snubbed the pageboy and then the waiter who wanted to take him into the main room.

He made straight for the bar, and there, among a throng of merrymakers and dubious women, he found the two men he was looking for, perched on high stools in a corner.

At a glance he took in Janvier’s sparkling eyes and highly colored cheeks. Radek, on the other hand, was staring at his glass in somber contemplation.

Maigret walked straight toward them, while Janvier, obviously the worse for liquor, made signs that were intended to convey:

“Everything’s all right... Just leave it to me... Don’t let him see you...”

But Maigret went and stood right in front of them.

Radek muttered rather thickly:

“Hello! You here again?”

Janvier went on making signs, signs he considered both very discreet and very expressive.

“Have a drink, Inspector.”

“Look here, Radek!”

“Barman, the same for monsieur.”

And the Czech gulped down the mixture in his glass before saying:

“I’m listening... And you, Janvier, are you listening too?”
And he gave Janvier a poke in the ribs.

“Is it a long time since you’ve been to Saint-Cloud?” asked Maigret slowly.

“Me? Ha! Ha! Ha! What a joke!”

“You know there’s another corpse now?”

“A good job for the undertakers. Your health, Inspector.”

He wasn’t acting. He was drunk. Not so drunk as Janvier, but enough for his eyes to be popping out and for him to have to hold on to the edge of the bar to keep his balance.

“And who’s the lucky fellow?”

“William Kirby.”

For a few seconds Radek seemed to be battling with his intoxication, as though trying hard to appreciate the seriousness of the news. Then he threw back his head with a laugh, making a sign to the barman to fill up the glasses.

“All right. So much the worse for you, old man.”

“Meaning by that?”

“That you’ll never understand. Less than ever... But didn’t I tell you so at the start?...

“And now let me make a suggestion. We’ve already come to an understanding, Janvier and I. It’s like this: you’ve taken it into your heads to follow me around. Good. It’s all the same to me... Only, instead of marching foolishly, one behind the other, taking cover in doorways, and all the rest, why shouldn’t we all join together and have a good time? Wouldn’t that be more intelligent? You see, we never know what the morrow may bring, so let’s enjoy ourselves while we can... It’s full of pretty girls here. We’ll each choose one. Janvier’s already made a pass at that little dark thing over there. For myself... well, I haven’t quite made up my mind... And of course I do all the paying...

“Well, what do you say to it?”

He looked at the inspector, who looked back at him.

And Maigret could no longer see the slightest sign of drunkenness on the young man’s face.

Once more those eyes were glittering with the keenest intelligence as they looked at him with superb derision. It was as though his whole being was in an ecstasy of triumph.

9

THE NEXT DAY



It was eight in the morning. Maigret had parted with Radek and Janvier four hours earlier. He was now writing, slowly, making heavy black downstrokes, pausing after each paragraph to see what he had written and at the same time to take a sip of his black coffee.

July 7. Midnight. Heurtin drinks four grogs in quick succession at Pavilion Bleu. Drops train ticket.

July 8. About 2 a.m. The two women stabbed. Footprints and fingerprints are Heurtin’s. 4 a.m. H. back on Rue Monsieur-le-Prince. Goes back to work as usual until arrested

evening July 9. Denies murder, but was certainly at Saint-Cloud.

October 13. Plan of escape sent to Heurtin. Appears to have expected something of the sort.

Oct. 16. 2 a.m. Heurtin escapes, wanders around Paris, apparently without aim. Ends up at Citanguette. Sleeps.

Morning papers report escape, without comment. 10 a.m. Anonymous letter received at *Sifflet* saying escape was engineered by police. Moers examines letter. Written at Coupole in American bar. Writing left-handed. Writer foreigner, linguist, intelligent. Coffee stain on paper. (Fits Radek.) Writer perhaps also victim of serious illness.

6 p.m. Heurtin comes down. Dufour tries to take newspaper. Shuffle. Light smashed. H. gets away.

Oct 17. About 1 p.m. Kirbys (just back from Biarritz) and Edna Reichberg in American bar of Coupole. Radek there eating yogurt. They do not seem to be acquainted.

Heurtin appears outside. Seems to be looking for someone.

Kirbys go, but do not notice H., nor he them.

5:30 p.m. H. still waiting when only Radek left. R. orders caviar, cigarettes, etc. Can't pay. Manager sends for police. R. marched off to police station, where he is detained. H., seeing R. with police, makes off, followed by Lucas.

8:30 p.m. Hôtel G. V. William Kirby changing dollars into francs. Says doesn't know Radek. Seems telling truth. Goes off with Mrs. K. to Ritz. They are there, at table No. 18, at 9 p.m. and stay till at least 2:30 a.m.

Heurtin wanders around aimlessly (has no more money), then makes for Nandy.

Oct. 18. About 6:30 a.m.. H. gets to Nandy and hides in shed. Father finds him. Refuses to let him stay. H. tries to hang himself. In bed since.

Paris. 7 a.m. Radek released. Shakes off Janvier 8 a.m. Gare Montparnasse. Enters Coupole bar 10 a.m. Shaved, clean shirt.

Puts 1000-fr. note on table. Yet day before had given himself out to be penniless and had certainly looked it.

Little later, I come in. He offers me caviar and starts talking of Henderson murder, though it was never mentioned in his presence by police.

He says police will never understand first thing about the case. Speaks of falsified data. Then throws down 10 bundles of 100-fr. notes, points out they can easily be traced, and practically challenges me to arrest him.

W. Kirby was back in Hôtel G. V. by 3 a.m. and does not leave again till 10:45. Yet Radek's notes are the ones Kirby got in his hotel when he changed his dollars.

Janvier stays at Coupole to keep track of R. Latter telephones twice.

3 p.m. Kirby is in house at Saint-Cloud. He would have heard me coming through gate and up path, would have looked through shutters and recognized me. Retreats as I go upstairs. When cornered, shoots himself.

Mrs. Kirby is with Edna R. at Hôtel G. V. She seems to know nothing of his going to Saint-Cloud.

Radek and Janvier have dinner together; later go to Pélican, where I find them both pretty drunk.

Having got that far, Maigret stopped and sighed. What a night it had been! Radek had dragged them around from bar to bar, plying them with drinks and drinking freely himself. Sometimes he had seemed quite drunk, and then a minute later perfectly lucid. And all the time he had been throwing out hints, and telling Maigret the police were floundering.

At four o'clock he had got hold of a couple of girls, and had tried to persuade the others to follow his example. When they refused, he had gone off with his two ladies and taken a room in a hotel.

Since then Maigret had not seen him. But just before eight he had called the hotel and been told:

“The two ladies are still in bed. Their friend has just paid the bill and left.”

Maigret was feeling flat and stale to a degree he had very rarely known when on a job. He looked down with utter boredom at the notes he had been making. A colleague shook him by the hand, but he did not even say good morning, just made a sign that pleaded for him to be left in peace.

In the margin he wrote: “Find out what Kirby was doing between 10:45 and 3 p.m. yesterday.”

Then suddenly, with a frown, he called the Coupole.

“I’d like to know how long it’s been since any letters came for Radek.”

Five minutes later he got the answer:

“At least ten days.”

He put the same question to the little hotel where the Czech had a room.

“About a week.”

Maigret next opened a directory and went through the list of the postes restantes in Paris. He finally selected the one on Boulevard Raspail and called it.

“Hello! Poste Restante? Police Judiciaire speaking. Have you got a customer by the name of Radek?... No? Well, he may use another name, or even initials... Listen, mademoiselle, he’s a foreigner, poorly dressed, red hair, long and frizzy... You know him? Good... Initials M. V?... And when did he last get a letter?... Yes, find out, please. I’ll wait. Don’t hang up.”

Someone knocked, and Maigret, without looking around, called out, “Come in,” and went on with his call.

“Hello! Yes... What did you say?... Yesterday morning at nine? It had come through the mail, I suppose?... Thank you. That’s all... No, wait a moment. It was a bulky letter, wasn’t it?... Might have contained a bundle of banknotes?...”

“Not so bad!” said a quiet voice behind him.

The inspector turned around. It was Radek, looking thoroughly washed out, though there was just a suspicion of a twinkle in his eyes. He sat down and went on:

“Of course it was childishly simple... So you know now how I got the money. The evening before, it had been in the pocket of that poor fellow Kirby. But was it Kirby himself who sent it? That’s what we’d like to know, isn’t it?”

“How did you get in here?”

“The man at the door was talking to somebody, and I just sailed in as if I belonged to the place. I wandered around a while, and then saw your card on the door... Very clever, don’t you think?... And here we are, right in the bosom of the Police Judiciaire...”

Maigret scanned the tired face. Tired, certainly, but not so much from a sleepless night. There was something else. It was more like that of a sick man, a man who has recently had some kind of attack. There were rings under his eyes. His lips were hardly red at all.

“Have you come to tell me something?”

“Nothing special. Thought I’d ask how you were getting along. You got back all right this morning?”

“Yes, thank you.”

From where he sat, Radek could see the notes the inspector had been making, as much to while away time as to help him get things straight in his mind. The shadow of a smile flitted across the young man’s face.

“Do you remember the Taylor case?” he asked abruptly. “But I don’t suppose you do, because you probably don’t read American papers... Well, Desmond Taylor, one of the best-known Hollywood movie directors, was murdered in 1922. At least a dozen people’s names were mentioned in connection with the case—stars, beautiful women, and so on. But no arrest was ever made.

“The case faded out. But there was an article about it not very long ago in an American magazine. Do you know what it

said? I can remember every word of it. I have an excellent memory.

“It said: *‘From the very beginning the police knew perfectly well who killed Desmond Taylor. But they had so little evidence that, even if the murderer had given himself up, he would have had to undertake the prosecution himself. He would have had to furnish the evidence that would corroborate his confession.’*”

For a moment Maigret stared at the Czech with astonishment, while the latter, crossing his legs and lighting a cigarette, calmly went on:

“Yes... And it was the chief of police himself who said so. That’s a year ago now... I remember every word of it... And of course Taylor’s murderer is still in the best of health ...”

The inspector had now relapsed into the casual indifference it was his role to assume. In the most classic manner he leaned back in his chair, put his feet up on his desk, and looked for all the world like a man who condescends to listen but takes no great interest in the conversation.

“So you want to check up on the movements of William Kirby?... When the crime was committed, the police never thought of that. Or perhaps they didn’t dare!”

“Perhaps you can provide some information yourself?”

“Of course. But so could anybody in Montparnasse... First of all, at the time of his aunt’s death he was up to his ears in debt. Six hundred thousand francs or more. Even Bob, the barman, had to lend him money...

“It’s often like that in these grand families... It was all very well being Henderson’s nephew, but he had precious little himself. He had another uncle with a colossal fortune, and a cousin who was chairman of one of the big American banks. But his father had been pretty well ruined ten years ago. So, you see, he was only a poor relation.

“And then, all his uncles and aunts and cousins had children of their own. That is, all except the Hendersons. So his cue was obviously to hang around and wait for them to go. They

were both in their seventies, so he wouldn't have to wait very long... What did you say?"

"Nothing."

Maigret's silence was visibly disconcerting to Radek, but he went on:

"You know as well as I do that if you've got the right kind of surname you can live without cash for a very long time... Besides, Kirby had the most winning ways... Never did a stroke of work, but all the more charming for that. Always good-humored. He loved life and loved everybody...

"Particularly women... And he was nice to them. Do anything for them... You saw him with his wife. He was very much in love with her...

"But that didn't stop him from... Fortunately there's a code among these people. So she never knew... I remember once they were having a drink at the Coupole together. A girl who was hanging around caught his eye. He turned to his wife and said:

" 'I'll be back in a minute. Just have an errand around the corner.'"

"And everybody in the place, except Madame Kirby, knew he was going to spend half an hour with that girl in the first hotel they came to on Rue Delambre...

"It wasn't just once, or even fifty times. And of course Edna Reichberg was his mistress, too. Spent the whole day making up to her dear friend Madame Kirby, and then behind her back ... Others too. Any number of them...

"He could never say no to a woman. I really think he loved them all..."

Maigret yawned and stretched.

"Many a time when he had barely taxi fare in his pocket he'd stand two or three rounds, twelve or fifteen cocktails a time, for people he hardly knew by name... And how he used to laugh. I never saw him look worried ... Just think of it: a being born under a happy star. Happy in his cradle, happy ever

after. A person who loved everybody and was loved by everybody... . A person in whom all is pardoned, even the most unpardonable things... Lucky too ... I don't suppose you're a gambler. So you don't know what it feels like when the other fellow cuts a seven and you promptly cut an eight. And in the next round, when he cuts a king, you go and cut an ace... Every time without fail. Not like us wretched human beings, but like the hero of a storybook ...

"Well, that hero's name was William Kirby...

"Even so, by the time Madame Henderson died he'd pretty well reached the end of his tether. In fact, I rather fancy he'd been reduced to imitating the signatures of some of his illustrious relations to keep his creditors quiet ..."

"He shot himself," said Maigret drily.

Radek laughed silently, a laugh impossible to fathom.

He got up to throw his cigarette butt into the coal scuttle, then sat down again.

"Yes, he shot himself, but not *till yesterday*," he said enigmatically.

"Look here!"

Maigret's voice had suddenly got rough. He stood up and looked Radek in the eyes, hard, and examined him from top to toe.

There was a moment's silence, almost nerve-racking, before Maigret went on:

"What the hell do you want with me?"

"I just dropped in for a chat... Or perhaps to do you a good turn. You must admit that it would have taken you quite a little time to collect the information I've given you in a few minutes... You might even like some more...

"Take that little Edna, for instance. She's twenty years old, and for nearly a year now she's been Kirby's mistress, while buzzing around Madame Kirby and making up to her...

“And would you believe it? For a long time now it’s been settled between her and her lover that he’s to get a divorce and marry her...

“But that needed money—to marry the daughter of Reichberg, the rich paper manufacturer. A lot of money, in fact.

“What more do you want? Like to know something about Bob? Plain Barman Bob, in a white jacket, with a napkin over his arm... Yes, and with a fine house in Versailles, and a fancy car, and an income of four or five hundred thousand francs a year... All from tips. Not so bad, is it?”

Radek was getting worked up. That harsh little note of exasperation had crept into his voice again.

“All this time Joseph Heurtin would have been earning about six hundred francs a month, pushing a delivery bike through the streets of Paris for ten or twelve hours a day.”

“And how much would you?”

It was snapped out brutally, and Maigret once more looked hard into the Czech’s eyes.

“Oh! Me?...”

Neither spoke for a while. Maigret was now striding up and down the room, his hands in his trouser pockets, except for a moment when he stopped to put some more coal in the stove. Radek lit another cigarette.

It was a queer situation. There was no clue that could enable Maigret to guess why his visitor was there at all. Certainly he seemed in no hurry to go. On the contrary, he looked as though he was waiting for something.

Maigret didn’t want to ask him questions. That would only be playing into Radek’s hand. Besides, what should he ask?

It was Radek who broke the silence:

“A beautiful crime... I’m speaking of Desmond Taylor’s murder. He was alone in his room. A young film star came to see him. She’s seen to leave the house, but he does not show

her out. He is later found dead in the room... You understand?... Yet it was not that girl who killed him ...”

He was sitting in the chair that Maigret kept for visitors. So the light fell full on his face. It was a crude light, almost surgical. And the Czech’s face had never looked so interesting.

The forehead was high and bony. It was lined too, yet the lines hardly made the face look older. The long hair and the rather dark blue shirt with wide-open collar struck instantly the note of cosmopolitan bohemianism.

He wasn’t thin, yet there was definitely something frail about him. His flesh didn’t look firm. In the molding of the lips too there was a suggestion of ill health.

His excitement was expressed in a peculiar way that would have been interesting to a psychologist. Not a single feature moved—it was only that the eyes seemed suddenly to be stepped up in voltage, giving his gaze an intensity that made others uncomfortable.

“What’s to become of Heurtin?” he began again after a full five minutes’ silence.

“The guillotine,” sighed Maigret.

A little giggle from Radek. The voltage was now at its maximum.

“Naturally!... A man who earns six hundred francs a month... But to change the subject, let’s make a bet. I bet you at William Kirby’s funeral those two women will be in the deepest mourning and will weep on each other’s shoulders. I mean Madame Kirby and Edna... But look here, Inspector—I suppose you’re quite sure he really did shoot himself?”

He laughed. It was quite unexpected. But then, with him everything was unexpected, most of all this visit.

“After all, it’s so easy to dish up a murder as a suicide. It’s very difficult to be certain. So much so that if I hadn’t been at the time in the company of that charming young man, our good friend Janvier, I’d confess to murdering him myself, just to see what you’d do about it... Are you married?”

“What of it?”

“Nothing... But you’re a lucky man... A wife. A modest job. The satisfaction of doing your duty. On Sundays you go fishing—unless you happen to be a billiard player ...Don’t imagine I’m sneering. I think it’s admirable. ... Only, you’ve got to be born to that sort of thing. You’ve got to have a high-minded father who played billiards too.”

“Where did you meet Joseph Heurtin?” asked Maigret suddenly, trying to catch Radek off guard. But he hadn’t got the last word out before he regretted it.

“Where did I meet him?... In the newspapers. Just like everybody else... Unless, of course... Oh, dear! How complicated life is!... When I think of you there, listening to me, watching me, out of your depth, not knowing what to make of me... and when I think of all that’s at stake: your career, your fishing, or your billiards... And at your age... Twenty years’ service, perhaps more. Spotless record... And then to have the misfortune, for once in your life, to get an idea into your head and try to see it through... A sudden flash of genius... Genius, you know, is like everything else. You’ve got to start young. It’s no use starting at forty-five. I suppose you’re about that, aren’t you?

“No, no. You ought to have left Heurtin to his fate. You might have been promoted... As a matter of fact, what’s the pay of an inspector in the Police Judiciaire? Two thousand francs a month? Three perhaps? Say, about half what Kirby used to spend on drinks. And when I say half, it’s more likely a quarter. But let that go... How do you explain the suicide of that charming young man? A love affair? There’ll be some nasty-minded people, naturally, who’ll want to connect it with Joseph Heurtin’s escape. And all the Kirbys and Hendersons, all those uncles, first cousins, and second cousins who are something or other in America, will be sending cables asking for discretion...

“Really, if I were in your place...”

He got up, threw down his cigarette, and stamped on it.

“In your place, Inspector, I would try to create a diversion. I would, for instance, arrest some fellow no banker or diplomat would dream of making a fuss about... Someone, let’s say, like Radek, whose mother was a servant in Brunn... How many people are there in Paris who even know where Brunn is?”

In spite of his self-possession, there was a queer ring in his voice. And his foreign accent was stronger than Maigret had ever heard it before.

“But, you know, it’s going to end up much like the Taylor case... Though of course there are differences. In the Taylor case there were no fingerprints, no tracks of any kind... Whereas here... Heurtin’s fingerprints, Heurtin’s footprints, Heurtin at Saint-Cloud in the Pavillon Bleu... Then Kirby, who so desperately needed money and who shoots himself when the investigations start again... And then me... But what have I got to do with it?...

“Kirby and I have never so much as spoken to each other. He didn’t know me by name, and I don’t think he even knew me by sight... And you might ask Heurtin if he’s ever heard of a man named Radek... Then ask them at Saint-Cloud if they’ve ever seen anybody answering to my description... Yet here I am at the headquarters of the Police Judiciaire... I haven’t been brought here, it’s true. But I don’t mind betting there’ll be someone waiting downstairs to follow me... And, by the way, I hope it’ll always be Janvier... I would be most grateful... He’s young, and such a nice fellow. Drink goes to his head at once—which, after all, is what it’s meant for. Three cocktails and he’s floating in a sort of nirvana...

“Tell me, Inspector, how can I send some money to a police charity? I’d like to give a few thousand francs...”

In an offhand way he drew a bundle of notes from one of his pockets, put it back, and took a similar bundle from another pocket. Then he opened his jacket and started on the pockets of his vest. By the time he had finished, he had produced the best part of a hundred thousand francs.

“Is that all you have to say to me?”

It was Radek speaking to Maigret, with an annoyance he could not conceal.

“That’s all.”

“Well, shall I tell you one thing more?”

No answer.

“It’s just this: you’ll never understand the first thing about it.”

He picked up his newly acquired black felt hat and moved awkwardly to the door, obviously rather put out, while Maigret muttered to himself:

“Sing, my pretty bird! Sing!”

MAIGRET BECOMES TALKATIVE

How much do you earn in a day selling papers?”

They were sitting outside one of the cafés in Montparnasse. Radek, leaning back in his chair and smoking a Havana, was smiling more diabolically than ever.

A miserable old woman was threading her way between the tables, offering her evening papers in an unintelligible murmur to the people sitting there. She was absurd and pitiful from head to foot.

“How much do I... ?”

She hadn’t understood, and from her vacant look you could tell at once that she possessed only the faintest flicker of intelligence.

“Sit down... We’ll have a drink together... Waiter! A chartreuse for madame.”

Out of the corner of his eye Radek shot a glance at Maigret, who was at another table, only a few yards away.

“Look! To start off, I’ll buy all your papers... But you’ve got to count them.”

Quite bewildered, the old creature did not know whether to obey or to run away. But the Czech produced a hundred-franc note, and she began to count them feverishly.

“Here, drink this up... Forty, you say?... At twenty-five centimes apiece... But wait a moment—that’s only ten francs. Would you like to earn a hundred?”

Maigret missed nothing of what was going on. Though from his face you would never have thought it.

“A hundred francs... Two hundred... Three hundred... Here we are... Or let’s make it five. Only, to earn it, you’ll have to sing us a song... Now! Keep your hands off. You’ve got to sing first.”

“What shall I sing?”

She stood there gaping, quite unable to grasp the situation. A sticky drop of liqueur slowly ran down through the gray hairs on her chin. The people around began nudging one another.

“Sing anything you like... Something jolly... And if you dance you’ll get a hundred francs extra...”

It was simply horrible. The wretch could not take her eyes off the money. In a faint voice she began to croak out some tune that was no tune at all, while all the time her hand was stretched out toward the money.

“That’ll do,” called out some people at the next table.

“Go on. Sing,” ordered Radek, who kept glancing at Maigret.

Protests arose on all sides now. A waiter came up and wanted to turn her away, but she stood her ground, clinging desperately to the hope of winning that fabulous sum.

“I’m singing for this young gentleman. He’s promised me...”

The end was still more disgusting. A policeman came up and led her off without her having earned a single centime. A boy was sent after her to give her back her papers.

There were other scenes like that, ten at least, during the last five days, during which Inspector Maigret, grim, sulky, obdurate, followed Radek, in and out, up and down, morning, noon, and night.

At first the Czech had attempted to renew their conversation. More than once he had suggested:

“Since you’ve made up your mind to dog my footsteps, let’s keep each other company. It’ll be so much more amusing.”

But Maigret had not responded. At the Coupole and other cafés he would sit at a table where he could keep an eye on Radek. In the street he walked directly behind him.

Radek's nerves were stretched. Indeed, the situation had resolved itself into a war of nerves.

William Kirby's funeral duly took place, mixing two different worlds, bankers and diplomats jostling the somewhat tawdry crowd from Montparnasse. And the two women duly fulfilled Radek's prediction. The latter was there too, calmly aloof, speaking to nobody.

Five days of it! A situation so unreal that it seemed more like a nightmare.

Now and again Radek would turn around to Maigret and try to talk:

"You still understand nothing."

But Maigret would pretend not to hear. His face was as blank as a wall. Not more than once or twice in all those five days did Radek even manage to catch his eye.

He simply followed; that was all. He didn't seem to be watching for anything or waiting for anything. Just following, obstinately. Always there, minute after minute, hour after hour.

In the morning it would be a round of the cafés. Radek apparently had nothing else to do. Suddenly he would say to a waiter:

"I want to see the manager."

And when the manager came:

"Do your waiters generally serve their customers with dirty hands?"

He usually paid with a hundred-franc or a thousand-franc note, shoveling the change carelessly into whichever pocket was most handy. At restaurants he found fault with the food and often sent it away. One day, after a lunch that cost him a hundred and fifty francs, he said to the headwaiter:

"There'll be no tips. The service was not good enough."

At night they went from café to cabaret, from cabaret to café. In the cabarets he would stand drinks for the girls, and flaunt his money in front of them till they were agog with

excitement. And once, he suddenly threw a thousand-franc note into the middle of the room, saying:

“Here! Scramble for it.”

Of course there was a free-for-all. One woman was thrown out of the place. And as usual Radek looked at Maigret to see if he showed any sign of being impressed.

Only once did he try to shake off his follower. And Maigret, certain he would find him before long back in the Coupole, had no hesitation in letting him succeed. On the evening before the funeral, Radek disappeared for a good three hours. Apart from this occasion, he never once gave Maigret any trouble. On the contrary, whenever he took a taxi, he would wait until the inspector had found one too.

William Kirby’s funeral took place on October 22nd. On the 23rd Radek dined in a restaurant not far from the Champs-Élysées. He had arrived there late and was still lingering over his coffee at eleven o’clock.

At half past he left, followed by Maigret. He took care to choose a comfortable taxi and gave the address in a low voice. A minute or two later two taxis, one behind the other, were going in the direction of Auteuil.

You would have looked in vain for any trace of emotion on the inspector’s broad face. Nor would you have seen either impatience or fatigue. Yet he hadn’t been to bed for days. The only thing you might have noticed was that his eyes had a slightly fixed stare.

Radek’s taxi followed the right bank of the Seine, crossed the river on Pont Mirabeau, and slowed down over the bumpy road leading to the Citanguette.

When still a hundred yards away, he stopped the cab, said something to the driver, and, with his hands in his pockets, walked down to the quay right in front of the inn. He sat down on a bollard, looked around to make sure Maigret had followed, then lit a cigarette and waited.

Minutes passed. Midnight came and went. Nothing had happened. Three Arabs were throwing dice in the bar, and a

man who had had a glass too many was sleeping in a corner. The proprietor was washing up. There was no light in any of the windows upstairs.

At five past twelve another taxi came bumping along over the ruts, and drew up in front of the Citanguette. A woman got out and, after a moment's hesitation, went inside.

Radek looked at Maigret in the darkness. His eyes in daylight would have appeared more sarcastic than ever. The woman was now right under the unshaded light in the bar. She had on a black coat with a high fur collar, which hid half her face. Even so, it was impossible not to recognize Mrs. Kirby.

She leaned over the bar and spoke in a low voice to the proprietor. The Arabs stopped playing and stared.

What she said was inaudible, but from outside they could sense the woman's embarrassment and the man's surprise. A moment or two later he turned toward the stairs behind the bar and went up. She followed. Then a room above was lighted up, the room Joseph Heurtin had slept in after his escape.

The man came down alone. The Arabs started asking questions. When he answered, he gave a shrug to his shoulders that seemed to say:

"I'm just as much in the dark as you are. But what business is it of ours?"

The room upstairs had no shutters, and the curtains were cheap and flimsy. Through them the two watchers outside could follow most of her movements. "A cigarette, Inspector?"

Maigret, barely five paces from Radek, did not answer. Mrs. Kirby looked as though she was stripping the bed.

She was lifting something heavy. Then she was bending over, intent on some strange occupation. At one moment she stopped and made a move toward the window, as though suddenly anxious, but she returned at once to what she was doing.

"It almost looks as though she had a grudge against that mattress. If you ask me, she's ripping it open... A queer job for her to undertake. Why didn't she bring her maid?" A

quarter of an hour went by. "Dear me! It's getting more and more complicated." Radek's voice betrayed his eagerness, but Maigret neither moved nor spoke.

It was just after half past twelve when Mrs. Kirby reappeared in the bar downstairs. She threw some money on the zinc counter and, putting up her coat collar, ran back to the taxi that was waiting for her. "Shall we follow her, Inspector?"

It was now a procession. Three taxis, following each other across the river. On the other side they turned, not toward Paris, but in the direction of Saint-Cloud.

Mrs. Kirby did not drive right up to the Hendersons' house, but stopped her taxi a little way off. She looked very small as she walked along the sidewalk on the other side of the street, hesitating from time to time.

Suddenly she crossed the street, went quickly through the garden gate, took a key from her handbag, and opened the front door, shutting it gently behind her.

No lights were turned on. But now and again there came a faint glow through the shutters on the second floor, as though someone had struck a match. It was a cold damp night. Around each street lamp was a faint misty halo.

Radek and Maigret had stopped their taxis farther off, a good two hundred yards from the house. Maigret got out and paced up and down by his taxi, his hands in his pockets, puffing furiously at his pipe.

"Well?" asked Radek. "Aren't you going to see what she does?"

But Maigret merely went on walking up and down.

"You may be making a mistake, Inspector. Just imagine... Suppose they find another corpse in the house tomorrow?"

Still Maigret made no response. Radek fingered the cigarette he was smoking, tore it to shreds, threw it on the ground.

"I've told you a hundred times you'd never understand. I tell you again, you..."

But Maigret turned his back.

Nearly an hour went by. Everything was quiet. No light at all in the house now, not even that faint intermittent glow.

Mrs. Kirby's driver was getting anxious. He had got out and gone up to the gate through which she had disappeared.

"Suppose there was someone else in the house, Inspector..."

Maigret turned and stared at him so hard that he broke off and said no more.

When Mrs. Kirby left the house, a few moments later, she was carrying something about a foot long wrapped in white paper, or perhaps a cloth. She ran to her taxi and drove off.

"Aren't you curious to know what..."

"Look here, Radek!"

"What?"

Mrs. Kirby's taxi was nearly out of sight, yet Maigret showed no sign of following. The Czech was getting more and more agitated. His lips trembled slightly.

"Shall we go and take a look around?"

"But..."

Radek hesitated. He was like a man who has made the most perfect arrangements and then suddenly begins to wonder whether they are going wrong.

Maigret patted him heavily on the shoulder.

"If we put our heads together, we ought to be able to understand everything. Don't you think so?"

Radek laughed, but it was not convincing.

"Well? Would you rather not come?" went on Maigret. "Perhaps you're afraid of finding a corpse. Didn't you say something about a corpse just now?... Nonsense. Whose could it be? Henderson's dead and buried. Elise Chatrier's dead and buried. William Kirby's dead and buried. His wife's just gone off in a taxi, so she's alive enough... And Joseph Heurtin is

safely stowed away in Santé's infirmary... Who's left? Edna perhaps? But what would she be doing here?"

"I'll come with you," growled Radek.

"Good. Then let's begin at the beginning. To get into a house one needs a key.

"Here we are. So now we can walk right in and make ourselves at home. Since there's nobody in the house—we agree about that, don't we?..."

It was no longer the same situation. Somehow the tables had been turned. The triumphant look of sarcasm had given way to a look of confused anxiety, which Radek could not suppress.

They were in the house now. Maigret switched on the lights in the hall. He knocked out his pipe against the heel of his shoe and refilled it.

"Let's go up... You see, the man who killed Mrs. Henderson had a pretty easy job... Two sleeping women. No concierge. No dogs... Nothing to worry about..."

Maigret did not even bother to look at his companion.

"But you know, Radek, you were quite right about the corpse. Yes, that would be a nasty surprise... Have you ever heard of Monsieur Comélieu, the examining magistrate? A man who can make himself very nasty when he wants to. And he's down on me already for having let Kirby shoot himself. You see, I was more or less there at the time. In fact, he's fed up with the whole business.

"Another corpse, indeed! There *would* be a hullabaloo. And I would be properly in the soup for having let Mrs. Kirby sail off like that without even finding out what she was carrying. As for you, how could you be implicated? You haven't been out of my sight the whole evening.

"In fact, for the last week we've been seeing a good deal of each other, haven't we?... By the way, there's one thing I'd like to know: Am I following you, or are you following me?..."

He rambled on, apparently quite indifferent as to whether the other was listening. They were on the second floor now, and, having crossed the boudoir, were entering the bedroom where Mrs. Henderson had been killed.

“Come in, Radek, come in. You’re not squeamish, are you? I don’t suppose it makes any difference to you that a couple of women were knifed to death in the place. By the way, we never found that knife. Heurtin was presumed to have thrown it in the river as he went away.”

Maigret was sitting on the edge of the bed, just where the old woman’s body had been found.

“And yet, you know, I’m not so sure that it was. In fact, I’ve come to the conclusion that it might, after all, have been hidden here... What was it Mrs. Kirby was carrying just now?... Do you see what I’m getting at? Something about a foot long. Wouldn’t that be about the size of a good dagger?... You’re quite right, Radek. You’re quite right... This case is getting more and more complicated all the time ...Hello! What’s this?”

He was leaning over the polished parquet floor, where footprints were clearly visible in the dust that had settled there. Heel marks, particularly. The heel marks of a woman’s shoes.

“Have you got good eyesight? If you have, you might help me follow these. We might even find out just what Mrs. Kirby came for.”

Radek wavered, like a man who’s not sure whether or not he’s being made a fool of. But he could read nothing in the inspector’s face.

“They seem to be leading into the other bedroom. Look! Here they go. Come on, old fellow, you’re not helping at all. Get down to it. You haven’t got two hundred pounds to bend... Here’s another... Then there... Hello! They’re going to that closet. Does it have a lock?... No. But we mustn’t be in too much of a hurry to open it. We mustn’t forget that corpse of yours. Suppose it’s there... ?”

Radek lit a cigarette. His hands were trembling.

“Still, we’ve got to face it... Open the door, will you?”

As he spoke, Maigret straightened his tie in the looking glass, though he did not lose sight of Radek.

“Well? Go on.”

Radek opened the closet door.

“Well! What’s this? It doesn’t look like a corpse to me.”

Radek had stepped back. He was staring in amazement at a fair-haired girl, who stepped out of the closet awkwardly, but showing no sign of fear.

It was Edna Reichberg. She looked from one to the other of the two men as though expecting an explanation. She did not seem worried, merely showed the embarrassment of someone who has been asked to play a part.

Maigret, however, took no notice of her inquiring look, but turned to Radek, who was struggling to regain his self-possession.

“Now what do you say to that? We thought we’d find a corpse—at least that’s what you’ve been leading me to expect—and out steps a charming young lady as alive as can be.”

Edna too was now looking with curiosity at the Czech. “Well, Radek, what are we to make of it?” Maigret went on genially. Silence.

“Do you still think I’m floundering in the dark? Eh?” The girl, who was still staring at Radek, opened her mouth to scream, but fright paralyzed her voice. No sound came.

Maigret had turned back to the looking glass. He had removed his hat and was smoothing down his hair with the palm of his hand.

Radek had whipped out a revolver, aimed it at the inspector, and pulled the trigger.

So Edna tried to scream, but couldn’t. Really, it was more comic than frightening. Just a little metallic click, hardly louder than a toy pistol would have made. No bang, no bullet.

And again Radek pressed the trigger. Again the silly little click.

The end came so swiftly that it was all over in a moment. Edna saw the inspector standing there so solidly in front of her... And in half a second Radek was writhing on the floor with Maigret on top of him. Two hundred pounds— that's what he'd said. Quite enough to knock the breath out of a body.

Radek was in handcuffs.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle," said Maigret, getting to his feet. "It's all over now. There's a taxi waiting for you down the street. Radek and I will take the other one. We've got such a lot to tell each other..."

Radek had risen to his feet. He was wild with fury. But Maigret's heavy hand came down once more, with a good-natured slap on the young man's shoulder.

"We have, sonny, haven't we?"

11

FOUR ACES



From three o'clock onward the light was burning in Maigret's room at Police Headquarters. The few people who went along the corridor during the early hours of the morning could hear a monotonous murmur through the door.

At eight o'clock the inspector sent out for breakfast for two. Then he telephoned Monsieur Comélieu at his home.

It was nine o'clock before the door opened, and Radek appeared, followed by Maigret. Radek was no longer in handcuffs.

Both men looked utterly exhausted. On the other hand, on neither of their faces was there the faintest trace of animosity.

"Is this the way?" asked Radek when they got to the end of the corridor.

“Yes. We’ll cut across the Palais de Justice. It’s shorter that way.”

Maigret took him to the jail by the private corridor reserved for the police. The formalities were soon finished. As a guard marched Radek off to a cell, Maigret looked at the young man he had been studying so closely. It seemed as though he wanted to say something—some little parting word—but he could not find it, and with an almost imperceptible shrug of his shoulders he walked slowly off to Monsieur Comélieau’s office.

The examining magistrate was trying not to look like a man in the wrong. As soon as he heard the knock on the door, he opened a file and turned over some papers as casually as he could.

But he could have saved himself the trouble, because Maigret had not come to crow. There was not the least sign of triumph or sarcasm on the inspector’s face. He simply showed the drawn features of a man who has finished a long and painful task.

“You don’t mind my smoking?... Thanks... It’s cold in here.”

And he threw a venomous glance at the radiator. He loathed central heating, and had insisted on its being done away with in his own room, to be replaced by a proper old-fashioned stove.

“It’s all over now... As I told you on the telephone, he has confessed. And I don’t think he’s going to give you any trouble. He’s a good loser.”

Maigret looked down at the notes he had written on odd scraps of paper. They were made to help him write up his report. But they were all in a jumble, and he pushed them back into his pocket with a sigh.

“The outstanding feature of this case...” he began, but that was altogether too pompous a phrase for him.

He got up and began pacing up and down, his hands behind his back.

“The whole thing was faked right from the start. And it was the murderer himself who told me so. And there has been more faking than even he imagined.

“When Joseph Heurtin was arrested, what struck me most of all was the impossibility of fitting his crime into any sort of pigeonhole. He didn’t know the victims; he made no attempt to steal anything; he was neither a sadist nor a madman.

“When I started over again on the investigations, I became more and more convinced that we had been following false tracks all the time. And not merely false—but faked, deliberately and scientifically faked. Faked with a skill that completely fooled the police and led the Seine Assizes into giving a wrong verdict.

“And the murderer—this is the interesting point—was the biggest fake of all.

“You and I both know something of criminal types. Well, I can assure you, neither of us knew anything about the type called Radek.

“For a week now I’ve been living with him, watching him, trying to get inside his thoughts. And for a week I’ve been driven from wonder to amazement, and then from amazement to stupor.

“A mentality that defies classification. And he would never have been in the slightest danger if he hadn’t been guided by some obscure instinct to give himself away. That’s why I call him a fake.

“Because it was he himself who put me on the right track. He knew he was doing it. Yet he couldn’t help doing it...

“And now that his number’s up, he’s more relieved than anything else...”

Maigret did not raise his voice. But he spoke with a quiet, contained vehemence that gave his words a peculiar force. They could hear people going to and fro in the corridor of the Palais de Justice, sometimes the heavy tread of policemen, but more often the lighter steps of clerks. Now and again a name was called out.

“A man who murdered for no real motive at all. Just for murder’s sake... But no, it’s not quite so simple as that either. I might almost say, to amuse himself... Oh, yes! You’ll see...

“In a way, there was motive enough—money. But then he didn’t bother to collect it... Yes, you’ll see. Though I don’t think you’ll get much out of him. Because there’s only one thing he wants now: to be left in peace. He told me so himself.

“His mother was a servant in Brunn. He was brought up in some kind of institution little better than a prison. But he got scholarships and was helped by various charities, and in the end became a medical student.

“As a child he suffered, and at an early age he began to hate the world, which he could only look up at from below. At an early age, too, he became convinced he was a genius... To acquire fame and riches by the force of his intellect!... A dream that brought him across Europe, ending up in Paris. A dream that enabled him to accept money from his mother, who, at the age of sixty-five and suffering from a disease of the spine, still worked as a servant so that he could finish his studies.

“A devouring pride. A pride goaded on by a feverish impatience, because he knew that he was afflicted by his mother’s disease, in fact a more rapid form of it. He knew he hadn’t many years to live.

“He worked like a slave. His professors regarded him as their most promising pupil. He had no friends. He never spoke much, even to his fellow students.

“He was poor, but he was used to poverty. Often he went to his classes with no socks. More than once he worked in the market, unloading vegetables to earn a few centimes...

“Then came the catastrophe. His mother died. There was no more money.

“And suddenly, without any transition, he turned his back on his dream. He might have looked for work, as so many students do. But no, he didn’t lift a finger...

“Did he have a suspicion that he wasn’t quite the genius he’d imagined? Had he begun to lose confidence in himself? In any case, he did nothing. Nothing whatever. He merely loafed about in cafés, writing begging letters to distant relatives and appealing to charitable organizations. He sponged cynically on any Czechs he happened to meet in Paris, even flaunting his lack of gratitude.

“The world hadn’t understood him. So he hated the world. And he spent his time nursing his hatred. In the Montparnasse cafés he would sit among people who were rich, happy, and bursting with good health. He would sip his *café crème* while cocktails were being poured out by the gallon.

“Was he already toying with the idea of a crime? Perhaps... I really don’t know. But I know that twenty or thirty years ago he’d have been a militant anarchist tossing bombs at royalty. But that’s no longer fashionable these days...

“He was alone, isolated, stewing in his isolation. Prided himself on it, reveled in it, and felt more and more superior.

“His intelligence is certainly remarkable. Still more remarkable is his flair for sensing the weaknesses of others. One of his professors talked to me about him. It seems that at the school of medicine he was positively feared on account of this gift. He had only to look at a man for a few minutes to spot the defects of his constitution.

“Meeting a man for the first time, he would say to him with malicious delight:

“ ‘Within three years you’ll be in a sanatorium.’

“Or:

“ ‘Your father died of cancer, didn’t he? Take care!’

“His gift for diagnosis was simply astonishing. And not only medically—morally too. In the Coupole it was his only occupation. Just to sit there and *diagnose*... All sorts of taints and weaknesses, physical and moral.

“Kirby, of course, came within range of his guns, and he gave me a most vivid picture of the man. Looking at Kirby, I must admit, I’d seen no more than a spoiled boy myself, a

nice-mannered, frivolous man about town. Radek had seen another side altogether.

“He sketched for me a happy-go-lucky Kirby, beloved by women, by everybody, and enjoying all the good things of life—but also a Kirby ready to put his hand to any dirty meanness to satisfy his thirst for pleasure...

“A Kirby who could let his wife live on terms of closest friendship with his mistress, Edna Reichberg. While all the time he was conspiring with Edna to get a divorce and marry her.

“A Kirby who was not above forging his relatives’ signatures, and who finally, in a careless moment, dropped the mask altogether...

“It was one evening when he was sitting in the bar of the Coupole with two of his innumerable friends. His wife and Edna had just gone off to the theater. Putting down the evening paper with a snort, he said:

“ ‘To think that this fool could kill an old woman for a matter of twenty-two francs—that’s all she had in the till—while I’d give a hundred thousand to anyone who’d get rid of my aunt for me!’

“What was it? Just a flippant remark? An idle boast?... But Radek was there...

“Radek hated Kirby more than all the others, because he was the most sparkling specimen of the carefree world he so much resented. And he knew Kirby better than Kirby knew himself. On the other hand, Kirby had never stopped to look at Radek...

“Radek got up and went to the lavatory. On a small piece of paper he scribbled:

“ ‘*Ready to earn the 100,000 francs. Send key, initials M.V., poste restante, Boulevard Raspail.*’

“When he got back to his seat, a waiter from another part of the café handed Kirby the note. The latter read it with a laugh, and then went on with his conversation. But his eyes kept wandering, scrutinizing the other people in the bar.

“A quarter of an hour later he called for some poker dice.

“ ‘Playing all by yourself?’ asked one of his friends.

“ ‘Just an idea... I want to see if I can throw at least two aces the first go.’

“ ‘And if you do?’

“ ‘Then it’ll be yes.’

“ ‘Yes to what?’

“ ‘Nothing important... Just an idea...’

“He shook the dice for a long time, and Radek could see that his hand was trembling.

“ ‘Four aces!’

“Kirby wiped his forehead and got up to go. He made some jocular remark to one of the others, but it sounded hollow.

“And Radek got the key.”

Maigret was now sitting astride a chair, leaning over the back. It was his favorite position.

“It was Radek who told me this story of the dice. I’m sure it’s true. I’ve sent Janvier around to the Coupole to see if he can find out anything that would corroborate it, though it’s rather late in the day for that.

“As for the rest, for the last few days I’ve had a pretty shrewd idea what happened. Radek’s story this morning has only filled in the gaps. Though of course it’s all thanks to him... Little by little he gave me the hints I needed.

“Just think of Radek in possession of that key! He could get even with the world... It wasn’t the money. I don’t think that hundred thousand francs really interested him at all. He wanted much more than that... And he’d got it...

“He’d got Kirby—Kirby, the bright young spark, the envy of Montparnasse—right in the hollow of his hand. That key meant power...

“At best he hadn’t many years to live, perhaps only a few. He had no attachments of any kind... Can you wonder if... ?

“I said just now that if he’d been born a generation earlier he’d have been an anarchist. But in our day, belonging to that jumpy, unstable, bohemian crowd wasn’t in his line at all... Something much more interesting, much more exciting—a *really grand crime!*

“A grand crime... He’s a pauper and a sick man, yet the papers will be full of one of his actions. He has only to lift a finger, and the whole machinery of police and justice will start turning. An old woman will lie dead and a Kirby will tremble...

“And he’d be the only one to know, sitting there at the Coupole over his *café crème*, a student nobody takes any notice of... But powerful...

“Of course, he mustn’t get caught. And the best way to make sure of that was to get somebody else caught. He comes across Heurtin at a café. More diagnosis. And having sized him up, he gets talking to him.

“Heurtin is hardly better treated by the world than Radek. He might have led a peaceful life at home with his parents, but in his way he is ambitious. He’s a daydreamer, devours cheap novels, goes to the movies, and pictures himself playing the hero in all sorts of marvelous adventures... But instead of that he’s carrying around bunches of flowers for six hundred francs a month... A spineless fellow. No will. What defense could he put up against Radek?

“ ‘Would you like to earn in a single night enough to live on for the rest of your life?’

“Heurtin’s dreams are rosier than ever. Another creature in the hollow of Radek’s hand. And Radek talks—so persuasively—and brings him around to the idea of a burglary...

“Just a burglary. And in an empty house.

“He works out a plan, down to the minutest details. Insists on Heurtin buying shoes with rubber soles. Even in an empty house it would be better not to make a noise! But of course it was really for the sake of the footprints.

“It must have been absolutely intoxicating for Radek. He hadn’t enough money to buy himself a cocktail at the Coupole, yet he could juggle with human lives.

“Time passed. He was in no hurry. Almost daily he rubbed shoulders with this Kirby, who did not know him from Adam. It must have been a grueling time for Kirby, waiting, knowing nothing; but he laughed and talked the same as ever...

“What finally opened my eyes to what had happened in the Hendersons’ house was a sentence in the pathologists’ report. It’s a lesson to me. One can’t read the experts’ reports too carefully. It was only four days ago that this detail got through my skull:

“ ‘*Several minutes after her death, Mme Henderson’s body, which must have been on the edge of the bed, rolled to the floor.*’

“You’ll agree that there was no reason for the murderer to touch the body again. Because Mrs. Henderson was wearing no jewelry—nothing, in fact, but her nightgown...

“But let’s get back to the story... Radek persuades Heurtin to enter the house, with a duplicate key he has had made, at *exactly* half past two. He is then to go upstairs without any light at all and grope his way to where he’ll find the money, that is to say, to the exact spot where Mrs. Henderson’s body will be lying. Radek swears there will be nobody in the house.

“At a quarter past two Radek went in, killed the two women, and was clear of the place a full five minutes before Heurtin was due to arrive.

“Having left the house, he watched Heurtin go in. Heurtin did just what he’d been told. And suddenly, groping in the dark, his hands touched a body, which then rolled to the floor. He was panic-stricken, switched on the light, saw the bodies, went up to them to see if they were dead, paddled in blood, and left traces everywhere.

“Dashing out of the house, he ran into Radek, who was waiting for him. Quite a different Radek now from the

persuasive one he had known before. A sneering, pitiless Radek.

“The scene between those two men must have been something monstrous. But what could a simple Heurtin do against the other? He didn’t even know his name or where he lived.

“Radek showed him his rubber gloves and the socks he’d put over his shoes. There’d be no trace of him in the house.

“ ‘You’ll be convicted, my boy. They won’t believe your story. *Nobody* will believe you. You’ll be executed.’

“They walked across the Seine to where a taxi was waiting. It was Radek who spoke to the driver, while shoving Heurtin into the cab. The driver never saw Heurtin clearly at all. That’s why we never knew how he returned from Saint-Cloud.

“During the drive Radek went on talking:

“ ‘If you keep your mouth shut I’ll save you. Do you understand? I’ll get you out of prison. It may be after one month, it may be after three. But I’ll get you out without fail.’

“Two days later Heurtin was arrested. He seemed almost in a stupor. He just repeated over and over again that he was innocent, but he’d say no more.

“As a matter of fact, he had told the whole story—to his mother...

“*And his mother did not believe him.* Wasn’t that the best possible proof that Radek was right? Who else would believe him if his mother wouldn’t? Better keep his mouth shut and trust Radek to keep his promise.

“Months went by. Heurtin in his cell was haunted by the memory of those two bodies and his hands sticky with blood. He still hoped. It was only that day when he heard them coming for Number 9 early in the morning that he finally broke down. But even then he wouldn’t speak.

“Then at last he got the note with the plan of escape. I think he only half believed in it, but he carried out the instructions just the same. When he got out, however, he didn’t know what

to do with himself. He wandered aimlessly around the streets, finally flinging himself down on a bed in the Citanguette. Poor devil, I suppose it was something, at any rate, to sleep elsewhere than in the Grande Surveillance.

“Anyhow, that sleep seemed to do him good. Because when Dufour tried to get the newspaper, he acted pretty promptly.

“Once more he wandered around. What good was freedom to him? He had no more money. Nowhere to go. Nobody to turn to. His father had not answered his letters from prison and had forbidden his mother and sister either to write or to go to see him.

“And all because of Radek. If only he could get hold of Radek!...

“What did he want with him? Did he want to kill him? He didn’t have anything to kill him with, but in the state of mind he was in I daresay he might have strangled him... Or did he simply want to find the only man he could now look in the face?...

“He began hunting, going around, one after the other, to all the cafés where he’d been with him. Because the two had always met in a café.

“At last he saw him in the bar of the Coupole. They wouldn’t let him in, since by this time he was looking like a beggar. He waited outside, turning around and around, going backward and forward, now and then shoving his pasty face against the window...

“When Radek went out, it was between two policemen. So that was no good, and once more Heurtin was an aimless wanderer.

“Then as a last hope, or perhaps instinctively, he turned toward Nandy, to the house that was now shut to him... But where else could he go?

“He slunk around to the back of the house and hid in a shed. But when his father found him and told him to clear out, he preferred to hang himself rather than start wandering again...”

Maigret shrugged his shoulders and sighed.

“He’ll never make good... Oh, he’ll live, all right. But he’ll never get over it, never be anything else but one of Radek’s victims.

“There were victims enough already, and another one to come. And there might have been more still if... But we’ll get to that later...

“So the crime was done, and Heurtin was in prison, and Radek as usual was camping most of the day in the American bar of the Coupole.

“Radek was still as poor as ever, since he didn’t demand his hundred thousand francs. Why didn’t he? At first he hesitated, fearing a trap. He wanted to see Heurtin convicted first, and the case closed. But there was more than that in it. Much more. He’d come to enjoy his poverty. It fed his hatred of the world...

“Besides, poverty plus power—there was something picturesque about that, dramatic even. And then there was the exquisite pleasure of keeping Kirby dangling in suspense.

“Kirby was still frequenting the Coupole, outwardly as cheerful as ever. Only Radek knew that his laugh was hollow. Kirby was puzzled. Like the rest of the world, he thought Heurtin was guilty, and wondered whether the murderer would denounce him.

“But he didn’t. At the Assizes, Heurtin put up practically no defense at all and was duly convicted. How impatient Kirby must have been for the execution, after which he could breathe freely again.

“Is Radek satisfied? Not altogether. He has had his grand crime and the whole plan has worked out perfectly. Not a breath of suspicion has come his way. He is the only one in the world to know the whole truth—that’s just what he’d wanted. And he can look with infinite disdain at the Kirbys and their futile gang gossiping over their cocktails.

“And yet he isn’t satisfied... Something’s lacking.

“I couldn’t swear to it, but I wouldn’t mind betting that what was lacking was somebody to admire what he’d done,

somebody who could say:

“ ‘Do you see that man? He doesn’t look like anything special. But I can tell you he has committed one of the most perfect crimes of the century. He has beaten the police, tricked the courts of justice, and altered the course of half a dozen lives.’

“It has been that way with other murderers. Most of them have had to confide in somebody, if only a prostitute. Radek is stronger than that; and anyhow, he has never been particularly interested in women...

“The papers say, one morning, that Heurtin has escaped. Isn’t that just his opportunity? Things are moving again: he won’t be left out. Wheels are turning: he’ll put a stop to them. After all, this is his crime and nobody else’s! So he writes the letter to the *Sifflet*.

“He has neatly avoided Heurtin by getting himself arrested. Another triumph! And he’s now thoroughly worked up. He wants admiration, does he? Well, what admiration could be sweeter than that of the police? So he comes to me and says:

“ ‘You’ll never understand the first thing about it.’

“From that moment onward it was a delirious, headlong downfall. He was bound to be caught in the end, but the game was too fascinating. He’d played with Heurtin and Kirby easily. But now he had come to the big stuff: he was going to play with me.

“He did all he could to intrigue me. He threw out suggestions to send me off on false trails. He drew my attention, for instance, to the fact that all the events in the case had taken place on the banks of the Seine.

“All the time he was making hints and allusions, some true, some false. He was living at a fever pitch. Flirting with disaster. He must have known he was lost, but...

“But he was lost anyway. Don’t forget that. A condemned man. Nothing to live for. All that other men respected either disgusted or angered him.

“Anyhow, if he was to fall, Kirby was to fall too. So he telephoned him to demand the hundred thousand francs. He showed them to me. What an actor! What a clown! Didn’t I say he was a fake?

“It was he who made Kirby go to the house in Saint-Cloud. Another bit of psychological astuteness. He’d seen me just before, for I stopped at the Coupole after getting back from Nandy. He knew I was reinvestigating the case.

Wouldn’t I naturally take it up from the beginning? In other words, wouldn’t I go back to Saint-Cloud?

“I wasn’t bound to go there that afternoon, but there was quite a good chance of it. And if I didn’t, he could send Kirby back there as often as he liked. Kirby could refuse him nothing.

“And if I found Kirby there, Kirby might be very embarrassed. Something might happen...

“It may be just his vanity, but he certainly prides himself on Kirby’s death. And on the whole I’m inclined to think... But still, we’ll never know...

“Another feather in his cap. His sense of power became more intoxicating than ever. And it was because I could see the fever in his eyes that I stuck to him day in, day out, obstinately silent and morose.

“How long would his nerves hold out? Many little things combined to tell me that he was on a dangerous slope... He constantly needed to indulge his hatred of the world. He humiliated people who had to serve him, made a fool of an old woman selling papers, got a crowd of girls to fight for a thousand-franc note.

“And every time, he watched to see what impression it would make on me.

“He was getting near the precipice. Sooner or later he’d lose his head and make a fatal slip.

“He did. The greatest criminals come to it in the end.

“He had killed two women. He had killed Kirby—or at least he thought so. He had made Heurtin a wreck for life. But still it was not enough. The curtain was still up, so the play must go on...

“But I’d taken a few precautions. Janvier was posted at the Hôtel George V with instructions to intercept all letters and telephone calls for either Mrs. Kirby or Edna Reichberg.

“One evening—it was three days ago—I realized that Radek was anxious to shake me off. It was my policy to give him all the rope he wanted, so I let him go. If he tried to get away altogether, there was mighty little chance of his succeeding. For one thing, I still had his passport in my possession.

“The following morning I was given two letters he had mailed.

“The first was for Mrs. Kirby, telling her that the murders had been committed at her husband’s instigation. To prove it, he sent her the key he had received and the box it had come in. The address on the box was in Kirby’s writing.

“Radek told her further that in French law a murderer could not inherit money from his victim. Thus the whole of her fortune was liable to be seized.

“He ordered her to go at midnight to the Citanguette and to open up the mattress of a certain room and look in it for the knife with which the aunt had been killed. When she found it, she was to take it away and hide it.

“If it wasn’t there, she was to go to the Hendersons’ house and look in a closet.

“You see this craving to humiliate people and at the same time to weave complications. Of course she would find nothing in the mattress, but it was fun to send this rich American woman on an absurd errand to a low-down bar for factory hands and bargemen.

“And that’s not all. He then went on to say that Edna was her husband’s mistress and that they had arranged to get married. He finished the letter by saying:

“ ‘*She knows the truth. She hates you, and she’s going to inform the police, in order to reduce you to penury.*’ ”

Maigret mopped his brow and sighed once more.

“Seems idiotic, doesn’t it? But there’s more to it than that, as you’ll see.

“Radek had spent the last two years inventing subtle forms of revenge. He wasn’t thinking only of making a fool of Mrs. Kirby.”

“But the knife?” asked Comélieau. “You don’t mean to say...”

“That it’s been there all the time? No. Radek had to go back to Saint-Cloud and put in the closet. And that was what he was up to when he gave me the slip that evening. At the same time, he mailed the two letters.

“A second key—the one he’d had made for Heurtin— was sent to Edna Reichberg with a letter saying that it was Kirby himself who had committed the crime, but that she could save his good name by going at a specified time and removing the knife that was hidden in the closet. He added that Mrs. Kirby had all along been in on the secret.

“I tell you it was megalomania. He felt like a demigod playing with human fates.

“Do you see now the situation he was preparing?

“Mrs. Kirby, deeply shocked by his letter and still further upset by the sordid little comedy she was made to play at the Citanguette, comes into the room where the murder was committed. Imagine the state of her nerves... And then to find herself face to face with Edna with a dagger in her hand— Edna, whom she now knows to be her enemy.

“Would there have been another crime? We can’t tell. But certainly Radek had planned one. And Radek’s plans are not to be despised.

“Well, I had those two letters, which had never reached their destinations. Like the letter addressed to the *Sifflet*, they were

written with the left hand. We would have had a hard job to prove he'd written them.

"So what I did was this: I asked the two women to help me, saying it was to find Mrs. Henderson's murderer. I asked them to do exactly what Radek told them to do in the letters...

"It was Radek himself who led me to the Citanguette and then to Saint-Cloud. I knew he would.

"Outside the Citanguette he enjoyed himself immensely, but at Saint-Cloud he was beside himself with impatience to know what was going on inside the house. He even suggested there might be another corpse to be discovered. And yet, when Mrs. Kirby left and I asked him to come in with me, he hesitated. Things seemed to be turning out wrong, because he had expected me to follow Mrs. Kirby.

"Still, he followed me upstairs, and it was he who opened the closet, though not to find a corpse; instead, out stepped Edna, as trim as ever.

"He looked at me. He understood... And then finally he did what I expected. He drew out his revolver and pulled the trigger."

Monsieur Comélieau stared blankly.

"It's all right. Nothing happened. As I told you just now, I'd taken a few precautions. I'd sent one of my men to look for a revolver in his room. When he found it, he reloaded it with dummies.

"That's all ...He gambled and lost."

Maigret's pipe had gone out, and he lit it again. Then he got up and stood looking into the far corner of the room with a frown on his forehead.

"And I must say he knows how to lose. He was wild at first, but only for a moment. We've spent the rest of the night together. I told him frankly what I knew, and asked him for the rest. He stalled a little at first, but soon came clean...

"Then he talked straightforwardly enough, except for a touch of boastfulness... And now that it's all over, he's

amazingly calm. He asked me whether he'd be executed, and when I hesitated, he said, with a laugh:

“ ‘Arrange it for me if you can, Inspector... I think you owe me it... You see, I've got an idea... I once witnessed an execution in Germany... And at the last moment the condemned man, who'd been steady as a rock, suddenly burst into tears and started whining: “Mother!”

“ ‘And I'm interested to know whether I'll do the same. What do you think?’ ”

For a minute or more neither of them spoke. In the silence they were once more conscious of the footsteps in the corridors of the Palais and of the distant and confused murmur of Paris.

Finally Monsieur Comélieau pushed away the file he had opened at the beginning of the interview. “Good, Inspector. Good!” he began. “I...” He looked away. The blood mounted to his cheeks. “I would like you to forget the... the...” But Maigret, who had been putting on his coat, held his hand out in the most natural manner in the world.

“You'll get my report tomorrow. I must go now and see Moers. I've promised him these letters. He wants to make a thorough study of them.”

After a moment's hesitation he went to the door, where he just cast a quick glance back at the penitent expression on the examining magistrate's face. When he finally left the room, there was the suggestion of a smile on his face.

It was his only revenge.

12

A PARTING SHOT



January had come. It was freezing hard. The ten men who were present had their coat collars turned up and their hands in their pockets.

They stamped their feet to keep warm, exchanged desultory remarks, and now and again threw furtive glances in the same direction.

One man, however, was standing all by himself, his neck disappearing into his shoulders, his face so disagreeable that no one dared to speak to him. It was Maigret.

The dawn was just beginning. Windows were lighted here and there in the neighboring apartment buildings. From time to time the gong of a streetcar rang out somewhere in the distance.

At last the sound of a van drawing up, the slam of a door, the tread of heavy boots, some orders given in an undertone.

A journalist was taking notes. He was ill at ease. Another man turned his back.

Radek, who had jumped briskly out of the prison van, was looking around with his pale blue eyes, which in the twilight had a remote and infinitely vague expression.

He was held by each arm, but that didn't seem to bother him as he walked with steady stride toward the scaffold.

The paving stones were icy. And suddenly Radek slipped and fell. The two guards, thinking he was trying to break away, pounced on him at once.

It was only a matter of a second or two, but this fall was perhaps more distressing than all the rest. What was so painful was Radek's shamefaced look as he got to his feet. He had quite lost the air of cool self-possession he had so carefully assumed.

His eyes fell on Maigret, whom he had particularly requested to be present, and who was now pretending he had not seen the young man's discomfiture.

"So you've come..." said Radek.

People were getting impatient. Nerves were on edge. Everybody wanted the business to be got through as quickly as possible.

But Radek looked back with a sneer at the place where he had fallen.

“That’s spoiled it!”

The guards stood there hesitating, the men whose job it was to extinguish a human life.

Somebody spoke. A car horn tooted loudly in the street outside.

It was Radek who stepped out first, looking straight in front of him.

“Inspector...”

In another minute, perhaps, it would all be over. The voice sounded strange.

“You’ll be going home to your wife, won’t you?... She’ll have made the coffee by now.”

The scene leaped to Maigret’s mind, obliterating all else. It was the exact truth. His wife was waiting for him in their cozy little dining room, and breakfast would be quickly on the table...

And somehow, without knowing why, he could not face it. Instead, he went directly to the Quai des Orfèvres, where he started poking the fire so viciously that he nearly broke his precious stove.

*“Hôtel L’Aiglon”
boulevard Raspail, Paris
September 1930 [Winter 1930-31]*

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[scanned anonymously in a galaxy far far away]

[for a complete bibliography of all 103 episodes of *The Maigret Saga*, check out [Steve Trussel’s amazing fan site](http://www.trussel.com/f_maig.htm) at http://www.trussel.com/f_maig.htm]

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